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ADELE FELL HEAVILY, STRIKING HER HEAD AGAINST THE SHARP EDGE OF A TABLE.

KESTREL'S FOLLY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

The bees were humming up in the tops of the young pine-trees. The sound was the loudest in Kestrel Wood, though there was no lack of life, colour, movement in that leafy spot—still leafy, green, dim—pleasant as it had been in the height of the past summer—that summer which had been so cool and rainy that herbage and leafage was still quite fair and young, and the year seemed to have lost none of its youthful verdure and pristine freshness, now that the air was balmy and soft, as it was in June.

The rich green of the grasses had not yellowed in the slightest. The elms and chestnuts had not gone off, but still flourished in all the majesty of their early garb; and save for the

absence of most wild flowers, and the reaper fields, and shortening days, Nature showed none of those signs, had adopted none of the sober tints and hues which she usually does when autumn has arrived.

Even the butterflies, mistaking the warmth of the steady sunshine for midsummer beams, swept by on the wings of the gentle breeze, or hovered lovingly about the heath-blooms, fluttering their blue, and silver, scarlet, or brown wings; while yellow-barred, wasp-like flies shot to and fro between the branches, and up on a larch-fir sat a goldfinch, singing with uplifted head, and a swallow flew overhead with forked tail shut; drowsy ants, half stupefied with the turpentine, climbed up the pines, and the willow-wren warbled its love-song in the fir-tops—not strongly as he had in the spring, but gently and wallingly, and still the hum of the bees in the pines dulled all other sound.

It was delightful there in that enchanted retreat. The delicious sea odour, the flavour of the briny ocean, pure, sweet, was refreshing, as

it came wafted up, the soft wind murmuring between the tree trunks, and resting awhile ere it wandered on, throwing back as it went the clear note of the cuckoo, singing his farewell, his note mingling with the call of the moorhens in the placid lake, near which the beeches grew thickly, and sedges and reeds swayed to and fro, and rustled as though whispering secrets.

On the mossy grass by its bank sat a young girl, her dreamy eyes fixed on the waters that bloomed blue under the sun's level rays, her hands crossed idly in her lap, her delicate neck bent forward, her head down-drooped, her whole attitude showing that her thoughts were far away, that only in the body was she there in Kestrel Wood—in spirit she was far away.

The little greyhound at her feet glanced at her inquisitorily ever and anon, snapping at the myriads of flies and insects that buzzed about them in the golden light meanwhile, and sometimes venturing to intrude the fact of his presence by putting a diminutive paw on her gown or hand.

These gentle demonstrations, however, being of no avail, at last he threw back his pretty gray head, gave a short, sharp bark, and scratched vigorously at the hand that lay nearest him on her lap. This was effectual. She woke from her day-dreaming with a start.

"What, Paro, are you tired, little man?" she asked, stroking his satiny skin, to which question the greyhound yapped an assent.

"Not really tired, you know, lad!" she went on, with a laugh, that displayed all her pretty teeth, "only tired of sitting here doing nothing. You rogue, you'd like to be off and away after those birds, wouldn't you?" as a cock pheasant rose soberly in a slanting, long-drawn line, and disappeared over the beech-tops, quickly followed by the hen bird, who, startled at Paro's rush, got on to her wings with a scream and a scramble, and went up in a zig-zag fashion after her lord. "Don't say you wouldn't," as the dog shook his head till his long, thin ears flapped together in a comical way, "because you know you would. Think of all the poor chicks you have slaughtered, and my brood of ducklings this spring, that I took so much pride in. You bad boy! Well, come along. You are in a hurry to get home—I'm not. This is the last time I shall be in the wood like this, Paro, the very last time. Perhaps when I come again it will be all different, and things won't seem half so nice to me—the sunshine dull, the trees withered, the grass yellow, this beautiful clear lake a stagnant pool, and the birds' sweet warbling harsh and discordant. Heigho! Who knows? I must be blue to-day, just a wee bit blue, or I should not be looking only at the dark sides of things. Conrad loves me, but then—marriage is such a lottery, and most draw blanks, Dama says, and few prizes. Mine may be a prize; at least I'll hope so, and until I find things turn out badly I'll be gay," and she sprang to her feet, and began running gaily and gracefully through the wood towards Kestrel's Folly, where all the years of her young life had been spent.

"Twas no wonder she was a little sad, a little uncertain, for in two days she was to leave her father's house, her grandmother's care, and become the wife of a man she had known only a few months, whose ardent and impetuous wooing carried all before it, brooked no delay or obstacle, and won Mr. Dalziel's consent to the early marriage of his eldest daughter. That Adèle Dalziel ardently loved the man who was so soon to become her husband there was no doubt. He was handsome enough, fascinating enough, to have snared a cleverer and wiser woman than Adèle, who had little experience of the ways and morals of the world of fashion.

Still, though she loved him, young as she was, a doubt as to the prudence and wisdom of her choice would sometimes cross her mind when recollections of certain marked defects in his character came to her. She had seen him thrash his dog cruelly for some trivial fault; lay the whip without mercy about his horses' flanks were they in the least restive or fidgety; pass a starved, hungry creature, imploring for a mouthful of food, with a gibe and jeer. Then he took an almost brutal delight in all sport, had ridden more than one hunter to death following the hounds, slaughtered the wretched trapped pigeons at Hurlingham with ardour, heard the almost child-like shriek of a hare when he struck it with a cool smile, and watched the writhing of fish he caught without making any attempt to stun them or deaden their sufferings.

Then he could brook no contradiction, no opposition. His will was law, and those with whom he associated must give way, or fall under the ban of his displeasure. Being extremely rich, most people gave way and bowed before him; those that didn't he cut promptly, and injured afterwards if he got the chance. He was jealous, suspicious, and yet not particular as to his own actions, which, at times, might have been termed shady; while his moral character was not without reproach.

His rooms were strown with the photos of popular actresses in every conceivable costume, and he habitually carried about with him a book full of his favourites, and had had it at Kestrel's Folly when staying there.

Adèle was too young to attach any importance to this "Book of Beauty," which might have excited suspicion in the mind of an older and more experienced woman, and it did not alter her choice, or rather—for she did not choose Conrad Huskisson—he chose her, wooed her with his usual fierce impetuosity, would accept no refusal, and actually gained her consent and her father's by the sheer force of a strong will, and a determination to have his own way—did not make her try to get out of her engagement.

Her handsome, specious, overbearing lover was too well versed in woman's ways not to be able to combat any plea she might put forth and silence any scruple, calm any fear. What could she believe against him when those deep blue eyes of his were looking love unutterable into hers, and his handsome mouth was murmuring honeyed phrases? Why nothing, of course.

A child of eighteen—for she was no more than a child, having been born and brought up in the country, and kept rather strictly by her grandmother, Dama, as she affectionately called the old lady, giving her the title her baby lips had formed in early days—could have no chance against a man of eight-and-twenty, who had lived in the midst of the whirl of frivolity and dissipation of London, Paris, Vienna, Moscow, New York, and other great cities, who had an unlimited command of money, who was courted, flattered, toadied, spoiled by all the women with whom he came into contact, and many of the men; for the people of his world counted and valued everything and everybody by £. s. d., and fell down and worshipped the golden calf with untiring devotion and praiseworthy energy, and were willing to swear black was white for the sake of it.

While Adèle lay dreaming in the wood her grandmother sat in the drawing-room at the Kestrel by the open window, in a high-backed carved chair; a stately, pleasant-looking old lady, in a stiff brocaded gown of faded leaf colour, which, with the muslin lace-edged modesty pinned across her breast, the filmy white arrangement doing duty for a cap perched on the top of her silvery tresses, rolled back over a coquettish after the fashion of Marie Antoinette, and her mitten hands, gave her the appearance of having stepped from a picture, an old-world kind of look that was charming to the eye.

In other respects she was charming too. A Frenchwoman, brought up in Paris, she had fascinating, airy manners, which marriage with an Englishman and a long residence in England had toned down into a sweet cheerfulness, very taking to sober Britons.

She was energetic, useful, elegant, devoted to her son, Leonard Dalziel, and her two grandchildren, Adèle and Hélène, a child of nine, whose birth cost her mother her life; had brought them up, trained them, and advised her son generally on all matters connected with them, advice which he generally took, and found good; sometimes when he didn't come to grief and getting into a hole, as he had done over a young woman he insisted on engaging as governess to Adèle, who made fierce love to him, and finally brought a breach of promises against him, which, though entirely innocent of, he was glad to settle by a heavy sum.

He had not taken his mother's advice with regard to his daughter's suitor, and Dama was sad-hearted in consequence, and wistful at the thought of having so soon to part with her favourite grandchild.

Her fine expressive eyes were full of tears, as she sat there that bright autumn day, looking out over the stretch of flower-filled garden away to the road that wound its white way from the station at Holt to the Folly.

The knitting at which she was engaged lay in her lap—a tangle of needles, balls, and silken thread—unheeded; a slender hand clasped on either side on the carved satyr's heads that formed the arms of her chair, and her whole attitude expressed expectancy and anxiety, for she gazed and gazed down the length of the white sun-swept road with undisguised eagerness; and when at last a black speck appeared in the distance bowling along at a great rate, she exclaimed, in queer idiom,—

"He comes. I rejoice. *Dieu soit bénit!*" and sank back amongst her luxurious pillows with an air of content and satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the occupant of the dog-cart, sitting beside the groom who drove the spanking grey so deftly, was looking about for old familiar landmarks with keen interest.

And no wonder, for it was ten years since Tracy Pierpoint had seen his aunt's home, the that sheltered so hospitably his young head.

When left an orphan, Mrs. Dalziel, with her son's full and free consent, took her only sister's only child, then a boy of five, and brought him up at the Folly.

Mr. Dalziel's marriage two or three years later made no difference in the home arrangements. Tracy remained an inmate of the pleasant English country house, and made much of and petted the little golden-haired baby when it was given a long leave of absence.

The first use he made of it was to accept his Aunt Gabriel's pressing invitation to come to Kestrel, and be present at Adèle's wedding, and there he was being driven through the fresh greenery of the English landscape, so familiar—and yet so unfamiliar—to his eyes, that for ten years had been used to dwell on mosques and minarets, bungalows and compounds, tropical vegetation and lush growth of flower and fruit, and the dusky dwellers, white-turbaned and gaily-attired, of Eastern climes.

CHAPTER II.

KESTREL'S FOLLY—so called, because a rich farmer in the time of the Merrie Monarch, having a soul for the beautiful, and above his surroundings, in building the place had put marble steps before the noble oak entrance door, tessellated his hall with the same thing from Saracolin, introduced carved balustrades to his staircase, and panelling to his rooms, and otherwise beautified his dwelling-place, thereby earning for himself the contempt of his neighbours and the addition of "Folly" to his name, by which title he called his home; and long afterwards, when he was gathered to his forefathers, the name stuck to his handiwork, and perpetuated his then considered idiocy—was a substantial stone-built house, with caken door and heavy-framed windows, a red roof out of which rose stack after stack of queer-twisted chimneys, a noble range of snowy steps leading up to the great door, opening into the square oak-panelled hall hung with spears and shields, swords and guns, foxes' brushes, deer's heads, and other trophies of the chase; an easy broad marble staircase led up to lightsome, airy chambers, sweet with the scent of dried rose-leaves and lavender, and numerous passages and corners, none gruesome or ghostly, however.

As it lay embosomed in its fine ancestral trees, that bent protectingly over the deep-hued roof—late roses climbing in wild and beautiful confusion over its white walls, peeping in at its windows, doves cooing by the chimney stacks, white-winged pigeons wheeling and circling overhead, regal peacocks sunning themselves on the steps, and on the lawn dogs lying near the window at which Dama sat—it looked the picture of a happy, rural, English homestead, and most pleasing to Pierpoint's longing eyes.

"Welcome, mon cher! I am glad, so glad to see you once more!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalziel, rising to meet her nephew with a great amount of ceremony, which he dispelled at once by taking her in his arms and kissing her with tender respect.

"And I to see you, my more than mother," he replied, leading her with a certain air of courtly grace that sat well on him to the chair in which he had seen her sitting as the dog-cart passed the window, and which he remembered she always used in bygone days.

As he looked around, after a little desultory conversation, it seemed that he had gone back with a jump to childhood. Everything seemed so familiar.

There was the Turkish ottoman on which he had often lounged, and the spidery-legged tables which Dama had laden with dainty chinis; the big Indian bowls, now as then full of beautiful flowers; the great lacquer cabinet, in which he had played hide-and-seek with Adèle; the Roman satin window draperies, the soft Turkey carpet, in which the feet sank luxuriously at every step; the oval venetian mirror, the Sèvres candelabra, worth a small fortune, and covers of the same costly chinis, studded with jewels, and mounted in plush frames, reliques that Gabriel Dalziel's father had saved from the Louvre at the time of the Revolution, when the unfortunate Louis and his beautiful wife were driven out by the howling, screeching, blood-thirsty mob. Then there was Louvouls, the old Mount St. Bernard, actually lying at his aunt's feet as he used to lie in the old days when Tracy was a youth—true, he was changed, grey, ancient, weather-beaten, not the noble, glossy-coated hound of yore; yet it struck a familiar chord in the soldier's heart to see him lying there, and not far from him, Bettine, a Persian cat, staid and respectable now; he remembered her when he left a frolicsome kitten, up to all sorts and kinds of mischief.

"Your old favourites look very well!" he said, patting Louvouls' great head, while the dog returned the kindness by licking his hand.

"Yes, je suis charmé de ça. They have had much care and nurture. That makes *les animaux* live long."

"True. Everyone under your roof, then, Dama, stands a good chance of living a long time!"

"In what way? You mean—"

"That you care so well for all your household, spend so much time and thought on what is for their benefit, that they cannot but prosper, and be happy and well."

"I try to, and yet," she returned, with a wistful look out at the blue, dancing sea, that lay shimmering and sparkling like a huge sapphire in the sun's brilliant rays, "I do not always succeed in my endeavour to make *mes plus chères heureuses*."

"No, aunt. You have some trouble!" he said, quickly, reading her face he knew so well like a book.

"Ala, mais oui!" with a gesture of the slender hands, a movement of the shoulders, that was wholly Franch.

"What is it?" he asked, anxiously, laying his sun-browned hand, that looked so strong and powerful, beside her delicate one, on it. "Can I help you?"

"I fear not," she answered, shaking her silver-tressed head sorrowfully.

"At least, let me share your grief," he urged.

"If you will, donc, mon enfant. You know, of course, of Adèle's rapidly-approaching marriage!"

"Yes, aunt. You wrote me of it."

"That is the cause of my trouble."

"Indeed!" returned Tracy, gravely. "Do you not approve of it?"

"No!"

The monosyllable was sharp, short, stern, and carried with it the conviction of the speaker's utter dislike to the projected alliance.

"In what do you object?" he went on. "Is it to the bridegroom-elect himself, or to his income, or his religion, or his manners, or what?"

"I object to him," replied Mrs. Dalziel. "Of course his position and income are such that any parent would be *charmé* to receive him as a son-in-law; but he is *fou, je pense*, extravagant, ill-tempered, overbearing, and not honourable in other respects."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Captain Pierpoint; "are you certain of this, aunt; for, if so, he is no fit husband for Adèle!"

"I am *certaine* of *quelques choses*," she rejoined, grimly; "but I have little or no proof to bring forward; and then Leonard is bent on the match. He is dazzled by Conrad Hus-

son's wealth, the grand people he knows, the elevated position the child will hold in the fashionable world, in London society."

"Those will be but a poor exchange for happiness and freedom."

"Poor, indeed, *ma chérie!*" with an expression of infinite tenderness. "If I could only save her from this terrible fate, this *triste mariage!*"

"And can you not?" questioned Tracy, eagerly.

"Alas! no. I am powerless!" with a deep sigh, that seemed drawn from the very depth of her aching, sorrowful heart.

"Surely Leonard will listen to you, Dama," expostulated her nephew, "take your advice and counsel in a matter of so much moment as the happiness of his child's whole life!"

"No. He is adamant in the matter. I cannot move him. He is deaf to all my entreaties, and says it shall take place on Wednesday."

"And Adèle, what does she think of this lover? Is she blind to his faults, too?"

"Hardly that, I think. Still she is too young to understand some things that might turn her against him, and, of course, is ruled by her father."

"Does she love him?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Very deeply!"—Tracy asked this question anxiously.

"Well, no. Very young people, as a rule, don't love deeply; *c'est après*, when they are mature that *la grande passion* comes, and remains until death."

"True. Have you said anything to her of your dislike to Husson, and your disapproval of the marriage?"

"No. I felt Leonard would let nothing turn him from it, and so I deemed it wisest not to say one word to her against this man who will be her husband. She thinks so much of what I say that after the fatal knot is tied, if suspicions were sown in her mind, they would bud, and bear bitter fruit sooner than if she has to find everything out for herself."

"True," said the soldier again. "You showed great discretion and judgment."

"I am glad you think so," returned Mr. Dalziel. "I have often wondered during these last few, sad days whether I should have done any good by appealing to her."

"Probably not. If she cares for him she would not see those faults and blemishes you have noticed. Love is proverbially blind."

"Oui. C'est vrai."

"You would only have made her unhappy without doing any real good."

"I trust that is the case."

"This young Husson, you say, is a man of fortune?"

"Yes. Twenty thousand a year."

"How old is he?"

"Somewhere about your own age. A year or two under thirty."

"He, of course, has seen much society in London!"

"Out, and in Paris, Vienna, Moscow, and other great cities."

"He must have seen some very beautiful and charming women in those gay capitals."

"He has. I know that. He carries about a book full of photographs of some of the most beautiful women in the world."

"Then I wonder that he has chosen Adèle, for though I remember she was pretty as a child she must lack that fascination and finish of manner to which he has been accustomed."

"No doubt she does. She is young and artless. As to looks, wait till you see me *chérie*."

"Partial, Dama," smiled the Captain, stroking the white hand clasping the satyr's head.

"No, I am not partial. I speak the truth. *Elle est gentille comme une ange.*"

"Dama!" he expostulated.

"Judge for yourself. Here she is."

As Mrs. Dalziel spoke Adèle came flying through the window, by Paro, and alighted at her grandmother's side. She was just going to throw her arms around Dama's neck, when she saw a stranger was present and drew herself up quickly.

"Don't you know me?" exclaimed Pierpoint, reproachfully.

"Cousin Tracy! Is it indeed you?" and in another second her outstretched hands were in his, and he was kissing the soft cheek held up so naïvely and innocently for the caress of his mustached lips.

"Yes, it is I. Do you think I am much altered?"

"Oh, yes. Ever so much. You look older."

"Naturally. Ten years have elapsed since we met, *chère cousine*."

"More manly, and so brows, and sunburns!"

"That is also natural. The sun of India has considerably more power than that of England, or at any rate he favours us with more of his heat there."

"Than that big mustache looks so funny."

"Regulation shave, too."

"Of course. Still it all alters you. I remember when you went away your cheek was as smooth as mine."

"Do you mean to say you can really remember me, or anything that took place before I left home?"

"Certainly I can. Why, did we not play hide-and-seek, in that," pointing to the great cabinet. "the last night you were with us! And did you not upset a bowl of roses and break it, and then were shabby enough to say nothing about it, and let poor Bettine be scolded in your stead!"

"*Mea culpa, mea culpa,*" laughed the soldier. "You are quite right. I did play hide-and-seek and I did break the bowl; only I think you were quite as shabby if you let Bettine be scolded, and did not save her and disclose the real culprit."

"One can never speak ill of the absent," she retorted. "You were far away, so I spared your memory."

"Poor pussy," stroking the fat, happy-looking cat. "Did you suffer for my sins?"

"And now, *chérie*, give me that long-deferred kiss," cried Mrs. Dalziel, holding out her arms, and in a moment the girl was looked in them.

"I forgot," she whispered, penitently, stroking the silvery hair. "Tracy made me forget!"

"And another will make this forget the poor *grandmère* soon," complained the old lady.

"Never, Dama, never," said the girl, firmly. "Nothing could ever make me do that."

"Thou sayest so now; time will show."

"It will, unbeliever," giving her grandmother's hand a gentle tap.

"Does he come to-night?"

"Yes," answered Adèle, while a rosy blush overspread her face.

"At what time?"

"To dinner."

"Ah, I must congratulate you," remarked Pierpoint. "Let me wish you every happiness."

"Thanks," she murmured, blushing again, deeper still.

"And may I offer this as incense at your shrine," holding out a velvet case.

"Thank you very much," she replied, shyly, accepting and opening it.

A cry of delight broke from her as she did; for there, nestling in a blue velvet, were a pair of diamond bracelets, and a butterfly aligrette for the hair.

The diamonds were cut in the European style and mounted in Indian filigree work, the effect being most brilliant, beautiful, and uncommon.

"Oh, Dama! Are they not lovely!" she exclaimed, rapturously displaying them.

"Magnificent!" agreed Dama. "Only rather costly, Tracy," turning on her nephew a look of rebuke. "They must have cost you a small fortune."

"Not more than I can afford," he returned briefly.

"Have you come into a fortune?" she inquired, with just a touch of sarcasm in her clear, still pleasant tones.

"No," he returned, laughing. "Only I was at the looting of Kirwee and Banda, and India makes a man's income swell surprisingly if he has luck."

"I am glad to hear it. Now run away, child, with your regal gift," as the sound of the first

bell tinkled through the house, "and dress quickly. Your bridegroom will be here soon."

"Well, am I right?" she inquired, as Adèle flitted out of the room light as a bird.

"Quite right," assented her nephew. "She has one of the most lovely faces I have ever seen, and—I am going to dress," and without another word he went out up the broad marble stairs to the pleasant, sweet-smelling room under the eaves that had been his when a boy, and proceeded to don evening dress, rather more soberly than was his wont.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Captain Pierpoint again descended to the drawing-room the last bell had just rung, and he found all the members of the family assembled there.

His cousin, Leonard Daiziel, was very glad to see him, and gave him a warm welcome. Then he was introduced to Hélène, who was as dark as Adèle was fair, and looked considerably more like fifteen than ten, and finally the bridegroom-elect was presented to him.

The moment his eyes alighted on Conrad Huskisson's dark face he took a dislike to him, though why he could hardly tell. Certainly it was not because he was ill favoured, for he was eminently handsome.

There could no fault be found with that oval face, with its regular features, olive skin, dusky brown eyes, and frame of ebony curls, unless perhaps that the handsome lips were a trifle full, suggesting the idea of sensuality, and that in the dark eyes lurked a look, indescribable in itself, that yet spoke of an ungoverned temper.

His figure was tall and well-proportioned, and his manners polished and fascinating.

Still, to the prejudiced and world-wide soldier, there was something about his cousin that was to be that made him think it would not take much to transform this elegant, well-bred man into a coarse brutal ruffian, in private.

They talked together, easily and naturally, as men of the world do, and Huskisson alluded gracefully to the Captain's costly and unique gift to his bride. Still Tracy, thinking of that "Book of Beauty," and his aunt's fears, was glad when the butler threw open the door, announcing thereby that they were to migrate to the dining-room just across the Saracolin marble hall, and he could leave the vicinity of his disliked companion without appearing to be rude; and offering his arm to Mrs. Daiziel, escorted her tenderly and carefully to the head of the table, Leonard coming next with his younger daughter, and Adèle and Conrad bringing up the rear.

The dinner was pleasant, and passed off well. It was especially pleasant to Tracy, being essentially English in every detail, and totally different from what he had been accustomed to for many years in the East—the creeping, silent black servants, the widely open windows, the profusion of tropical flowers and fruit, the huge coolers full of ice encircling every bottle, the highly-seasoned, savoury dishes, so necessary to promote appetite in hot climates, and the punkah waving slowly to and fro, bringing a wave of cool air with it.

Here there was a profusion of handsome silver and cow-ear-like glass, vases of dewy roses, soft-shaded candle-light and well-mannered white attendants, while the simple fare—roast beef and mutton, chickens and grouse—were put on the table and carved by Mr. Daiziel; and a small fire crackled merrily in the wide grate, and the windows were shut, and the blinds were down, and all was homelike and comfortable to the last degree, and while they discussed these British dainties, and talked of everything in general, Tracy's keen grey eyes constantly sought and rested on Adèle's exquisite face.

In all his life he had never seen anything so sweet. She was as fair as a woman could be, with a beautiful white skin, just tinged on the cheek with pink, delicate, clear-cut features; deep-grey eyes fringed with golden lashes; and hair so bright that it seemed positively to have caught the sunbeams captive, meshed them in

its silken threads, and kept their colour and brilliance.

Then her expression was singularly sweet and sub-like; and as she sat beside her betrothed she looked like day and he night, and a greater contrast than the two presented could hardly have been found in the whole world.

He was exceedingly attentive to her. The closest observer, the most critical person, could not have discovered anything to object to.

He watched her, attended to her wants, kept up a lively conversation, and often regarded her with unmistakable looks of admiration.

Despite all this Tracy Pierpoint, watching them with sombre eyes that were somewhat wistful, told himself that this man was insatiable, fickle, changeable; that he did not love this beautiful girl as she deserved to be loved; and that the counterfeit, or at any rate temporary affection he felt for her, possession and time would dull, if not kill altogether.

It was a shame, he thought, fiercely, that he should have gone out of his beaten tracks to find a wife; that he had chosen this woodland blossom, this country wild flower, instead of seeking a mate among the women of his own world, his own set.

Those exotic, those hothouse blooms, who were capable of meeting him with his own weapons, who were thoroughly artificial, trained coquettes, and who would feel the loss of his affection about as much as they would the death of a favourite lapdog, the spoiling of a new gown, or the robbery of a valuable trinket, and who would console themselves with heaps of frippery and finery, horses and carriages, diamonds and diners, balls and lunches, and flit away the hours in careless indifference of a good-for-nothing husband.

Adèle was natural! there was nothing artificial about her, and she would feel the humiliation of neglect and indifference terribly—she who had always lived in an atmosphere of love and affection, surrounded by all those attentions dear ones provide for each other.

The change would affect her beyond doubt. It might break her heart! Might kill her!

He glanced across at the object of those reveries here, and saw she was just rising from the table in response to a signal from her grandmother, so hastening to the door he held it open while the ladies filed through.

"I shall expect to hear you sing to-night," he said, softly, as she passed him.

"It will give me much pleasure to do so," smiled Adèle, in reply, and her lover seeing the smile knitted his swart brows in a black frown, and wondered what on earth that long-legged military fellow was whispering to his betrothed about.

However, he smoothed his face, and spoke civilly enough while they sat over their nuts and wine smoking. But he seemed to find it dull, and soon made an excuse to join the trio in the drawing-room. Tracy was not long in following, and Daiziel, not caring to be left alone, came too.

"Now, Hélène, it is quite time you went to bed," said Dama, authoritatively, as the two latter came in.

"Oh, do let me stay up a little longer!" pleaded the child.

"No. See the time! Veux. Nine o'clock."

"I want to talk to Cousin Tracy."

"So do I," murmured her grandmother, adding aloud, "You can't to-night, chérie. Rise early to-morrow and chat with him in the garden. He will tell you of all his adventures then."

Seeing resistance was useless, Hélène, with a mischievous look on her handsome face, bade the assembled company good-night, and disappeared to the upper regions and the arms of Morpheus.

"What do you think of him?" asked the old lady, in an eager whisper, as soon as the door closed behind the child, of her nephew, who had flung himself down on the sofa at her side.

"He is very handsome," he replied, with an assumption of indifference he did not feel.

"I don't mean that," said his companion, a bit testily. "You have travelled and seen divers nations and nationalities, many men, and must

have some insight into human nature—be able, to a certain extent, to read a face. Now what have you read in him?"

"I have had little time to study it," he rejoined, guardedly.

"We were two hours at dinner."

"That is not long to read a character. Besides which, at a dinner, before others—others, too, who he knows would note any unfavourable exhibition—a man naturally keeps a guard over himself, his manners, and even the expression of his face, and lets little be seen that he prefers to hide."

"Still there are certain marks and traits in a face that nothing can hide," she went on, impatiently. "There is a line between the brows that I have always heard denotes an ungovernable temper. Then his lips are thick and his nostrils dilated. You don't mean to tell me those are good features, or indications of good temper!"

"No, I don't," he agreed, reluctantly. "It is not an altogether pleasant face, and can hardly be termed good-tempered looking."

"No, indeed. C'est abominable. How I wish I could find out if certaines choses are true. How I wish I could prevent this wedding."

"It is too late, Dama," said Pierpoint, in a low husky tone.

"Ah! Ciel! Oui. The day after to-morrow my darling will be sacrificed."

"Aunt!" said the young man, imploringly, "don't let us talk of it. Chère, chère. Let us hope her future, her married life, will be bright and beautiful, replete with joy and happiness."

"We will not speak of it as you do not wish it," returned the old lady, slowly, giving him a curious steady look of which he was quite unconscious, as his eyes were fixed on the Turkey carpet; "and, as you say, nothing can be done. It is too late!"

"Shall I ask her to sing now? Do you think I might?" he questioned, somewhat eagerly, looking across at the little spidery-legged table opposite where the lovers sat, opening packages and displaying to each other, or rather Adèle was displaying to Conrad the numerous gifts that had arrived.

"Of course. Ask her at once," replied Dama, only too delighted at having an opportunity of separating these two, between whom she would have put leagues of sea and land, had she the power to do so.

"Will you sing something for us, Adèle?" asked Pierpoint, emboldened by his aunt's remark.

"Yes; with pleasure," she answered with a sweet readiness, so different from the mock-modesty of society maidens, and therefore very charming, putting down her presents, and rising at once to go to the piano—at which her lover frowned again.

"What do you like?"

"Anything," returned her cousin.

"Haven't you a favourite ditty?"

"No. I must acknowledge that I have not."

"Most people have."

"Have they?"

"Yes. And a favourite composer too."

"Really. Then I suppose I am a sort of Goth!"

"I suppose you are," she agreed, with a little ringing laugh, full of sweet joyousness.

"You see I've been in India so long, a remote part, too," he said, apologetically.

"That is some excuse for your shocking ignorance," she declared, demurely, trying to keep the corners of her pretty mouth from curling up into a smile. "You did not see much new music in Barmah, did you?"

"None at all," he responded, promptly.

"And since you have been in England?" she inquired, glancing up at him with those lovely, long-fringed eyes.

"Since I have been in England," he answered, "which, as you know, is only a few days, not yet a month, I have been so busy that I have had no chance of hearing any, and only went to the theatre once, when I saw a tragedy."

"Then you will like some simple ballad!"

"I shall like anything you sing," he said, im-

pushively, forgetting everything as he gazed at the slender, white-robed figure, with its dainty, well-potted head, and coronal of golden locks.

"My Queen of Hearts, I cannot look
Upon thee and be wise ;
For I must read in Love's own book
When looking in thine eyes.
Soft, artless wiles, yet full of grace,
Lurk in their depths below—
Those witching ways that win a heart,
As all true lovers know."

No, he could not "look on her, and be wise." Unknown to her, unconsciously, she bewitched him ; and, though he would not have acknowledged it even to himself, she had stolen his heart away by her simple, yet witching ways.

"Then I am to choose ! " she went on, after a pause.

"D., please," he agreed, eagerly. "You will choose what suits you best."

"Then Lashai sing 'Memories.'

And sitting down, she struck the opening bars of the song, and began in low, rich tones :

"My heart is heavy, my heart is sore,
For the light of the days I shall see no more—
For the old unrest, and the old aches pain
Of the love that may never be mine again—
The eyes that could rule at their sweet, will will,
The touch of the lips that my heart could still,
The clasp of the hand that I hold so dear,
And the words that yet in my dreams I hear.
Can the Future be as the Past hath been ?
Or the days to come as the days we've seen ?
Nay, Hope's soft whisper is scarce so fair
As Memory's dreams of the things that were."

The melody was pretty, a trifle melancholy and weird ; and it was perhaps a strange song for a girl in her position to sing. It seemed to show that she was looking back, instead of forward ; and this struck Tracy as he listened attentively to the words.

"Thanks ; it is very pretty ! " he said, in low tones when she stopped, and struck the final chords.

"I am glad you like it. It is one of my favourites."

"What a doleful ditty ! " broke in Huskisson, who had risen, and lounged towards them abruptly.

"Don't you like it ? " she asked, looking at him with a very tender light shining in her soft eyes that, somehow or other, sent a pang, the first of many and many an after-twinge, through her cousin's heart.

"No. Sing me something bright and pleasant, to take the echo of that thing out of my ears ;" and obediently she played the prelude to a gay ballad, and sang it, and then many more of his choosing ; and Tracy had to stand aside to give place to the man who had the right to be at her side, and monopolise her attention.

CHAPTER IV.

ADELÉ's wedding-day rose bright and beautiful—one of those autumn days that come to remind us of the bygone summer, when clear, feathery clouds sweep across the deep blue, sunlit sky, and the birds sing, and the breeze is balmy, and the grasses sway gently to and fro, and the flowers lift up their heads and expand in the warm, exhilarating atmosphere, and all nature looks at its best.

Certainly, around Kestrel it looked its fairest as the wedding-party drove to the quaint Tudor church where the marriage was to be celebrated.

The hills were covered with gorse and heather, brilliant patches of purple and yellow bloom ; pansies flourished there too ; in the hollows, here and there, deer lay resting at the hills' base ; the grass-green river rolled on to join the blue dancing waters of the ocean, and the ships' sails shone white in the sunrays, and the little cobblestones looked like fairy vessels, as they sailed away towards the distant horizon where sky and sea met in one long hazy line.

It was a grand wedding, though the Dalziels had wished it to be quiet. However, Mr. Conrad Huskisson did not wish it to be quiet, and so it was full of pomp and pageantry ; and crowds of invited guests—mostly the bridegroom's intimates

—were there to stare and criticise, and make the girl-bride feel more shy and tremulous than she would otherwise have done.

He had no intention of allowing such an important event to pass without an immense amount of fuss and confusion. It was a fine opportunity to display his wealth and intimate acquaintance with the great ones of the land ; and marquises and earls were present, and even a duke, while the toilets were magnificent, the carriages handsome, the bridesmaids, twelve in number, and all save one—her sister—unknown to the bride, while a couple of diminutive pages—Huskisson's nephews—held up her brocaded satin train, and three clergymen and a bishop tied the fatal knot.

The breakfast was on an equally gorgeous scale, Gunter perpetrating a triumph in the way of confectionery and wedding-cake, which was big enough to make three ordinary ones ; and, somehow or other, all this glitter and display and magnificence looked strangely out of place in the old-world, quaint, homely, Stuart house.

No one was sorry when the bride and bridegroom drove away amidst a perfect storm of roses and satin slippers, and all were free to depart, except, perhaps, Dama and Mr. Dalziel, and they naturally regretted parting with their darling ; while as to Tracy it was an absolute relief to get out of his coat and light necktie, and donning a tweed suit to go out for a long, solitary walk through Kestrel Wood, and try and forget this fit of madness, this attack of "sweet unreason," which had come upon him so suddenly.

A delicious four months was spent by Adèle wandering with her husband over foreign towns, journeying up the Rhine, visiting Switzerland, and finally reaching Paris—that Paradise of pleasure and frivolity.

At first she was delighted with the attractions of the gay city, and charmed with the beautiful suite of apartments they had at one of the best hotels, but after a few weeks she grew a wee bit tired of the incessant round of galasies, and if the truth must be told—a little homesick.

She had never been parted from Dama and her father before, and it was only natural that she should wish to see them again.

"Conrad," she said, hesitatingly, one bright spring morning as she stood by the window watching the ever-moving, gaily-clad crowd beneath.

"Well, my love," he replied, cavalierly—he was beginning, just beginning, to treat her a trifle coolly, and she, sensitive to the last degree, noticed it, and already spoke less freely to him.

"Are we going to stay here much longer ?"
"I don't know. It depends on circumstances. Why do you ask ?"

"Because," with still more hesitation, the colour coming and going in her soft cheeks, "I thought you said we should only be abroad four months ! "

"Well ! " he looked at her rather coldly as he uttered this word. He did not like this questioning ; she had yielded him such reverential obedience up to the present.

"I—I—should like to see father—and Dama ! " faltering a little under the steady glance of those dark, cold eyes, that somehow seemed different from those of the ardent lover of a few months back.

"I am afraid your desire won't be gratified just yet. We shall not return to England at present."

"Why not ? " she broke out impulsively.

"Because I wish to stay in Paris, and I am sorry you don't find the society of your husband enough for you. Most women would," he concluded, sarcastically, rising and leaving the room.

"Oh ! Conrad, Conrad ! I did not mean to offend you. Come back ! " she cried, stretching out her arms after his retreating figure.

But he was deaf to her pleading ; and when she realised that he had left her in anger, without a single caress or kind word, and all for nothing, her heart sank, and she burst into a

bitter fit of sobbing, the first of many and many an after-paroxysm that his cruelty and neglect caused her.

For some time he rejected all her advances to friendliness, determining to punish her mutiny, and also because the sweets of married life were beginning to cloy his fastidious taste, and it suited his purpose not to be on too good terms with his wife, leaving him more liberty to come and go as he pleased when there was a tiff. So the poor child had a trying time of it, endeavouring to humour and please her tyrant, who, while proud of her great beauty, and showing her off to all his friends as one of his unattainable possessions, was gradually letting the mask drop, and showing himself in his true colours.

The horror and humiliation she felt when the first doubt of him crossed her mind no pen can describe. She was so pure, so good herself, had been so carefully sheltered all her life from evil, that to her the revelation was worse than it would have been to one differently brought up. She shrank from his touch, his caresses, when he would return after a lengthy absence, and at last, after a terribly stormy scene, only consented to remain under his roof for the sake of appearances and for the sake of Dama and her father, who she knew would be heart-broken if they learned the truth, which they must if she left him.

She struggled through the dreary days as best she could alone—longing for the light of the days she would see no more—her graceless husband being absent nearly always, and only showing up when necessary to keep long tongues from wagging too freely.

Her people came over to Paris in the summer for a month, and during that time he played the part of an affectionate and tender spouse admirably.

But she only despised him the more for his unblushing and bare-faced hypocrisy, and set her teeth hard when he caressed her in public, and bore it for Dama's sake, thereby blinding her eyes to a certain extent. Not quite, though, for the old lady read a story in the beautiful, wistful face.

Life seemed harder than ever to Adèle after they left, and her husband's conduct grew worse. He was constantly seen in the Bois and the Champs Elysées driving with a handsome, showy-looking woman ; and towards the end of the second year of her married life an appeal for help reached her from one of his victims, and made her decide to leave him, and no longer screen his infamy.

She was sitting in her travelling-dress waiting for the carriage to come to take her to the station, *en route* for England, a few evenings later, when her husband came in flushed with wine, and in a brutal humour.

"Where are you off to, madame ? " he demanded.

"To England," she returned, quietly, though she was trembling with fear, cold with terror.

"The deuce you are ! " he exclaimed. "You seem to forget," he went on, quickly, "that you have not obtained my consent to your taking this little pleasure-trip."

"It is no pleasure-trip, and your consent is not necessary."

"Indeed ! What do you mean ? "

"I mean that I am going to leave you now, that I shall never return to France, nor to your roof."

"None of this rubbish, Adèle. You are my wife, and here you must remain ! "

"I will not," she said, proudly, lifting her beautiful head defiantly.

"You will ! "

"You mistake ! That," tossing him the letter of appeal disdainfully, "free me from you."

He caught the letter and read it, his brow growing blacker and blacker.

"It is a lie ! " he said, briefly.

"It is no lie."

"How do you know ? "

"I have been to that address. I have seen the wretched woman and," with a catch in her breath, "your child."

"Spy ! " he sneered.

"Let me pass," she exclaimed, making a step forward.

"You shall not."

"I must. Let me go," as he seized her slender wrist. "Oh, how cruel!" as he pushed her roughly backwards and she fell heavily, striking her head against the sharp edge of a table.

For days after the poor, sorrow-laden child lay on her bed too ill to move. At the end of a week her father, to whom she had managed to get a telegram sent, arrived.

"Father, father, take me home!" she murmured, rising from the couch on which she was reclining, and throwing herself into his outstretched arms.

"My poor, injured darling, don't tremble! You are safe now—safe with me. I will take you back to Dame to-morrow;" and without seeing his graceless son-in-law, who was nowhere to be found, wisely absenting himself when he heard Mr. Dalziel had come, lest the indignant father's anger should burst in all its fury on his worthless head, he hurried his maid into getting everything ready, and the next day started for England with the poor, broken-spirited, heart-weary Adèle, who still bore on her fair face the black mark of her brutal husband's violence.

CHAPTER V.

How peaceful the Folly looked to the girl's sad eyes as the carriage drew up at the foot of the marble steps, and her father helped her out with infinite tenderness, and she saw Dame standing at the top with outstretched arms, and in a moment she was in them sobbing out her sorrow in that safe haven!

Gently the old lady led her into the drawing-room, soothing and caressing her, and when she was quiete Helène came and kissed her sister, and unconsciously did a good deal towards restoring the worse than widowed woman's calm by chattering in her girlish and rather selfish way about herself and her possessions—showed her big, green parrot that talked so glibly, and swore a little—if the truth must be told—given her by young Linklater, the Benjamin of a neighbouring family, who had been born to his father exactly twenty years after his sister, Miss Hepzibah Linklater, first saw the light of day, consequently annoying that lady greatly, as his arrival did away with her heiress-ship, and reduced her to the paltry fortune of four hundred a-year; besides, it was exceedingly inconvenient to have a brother growing up twenty years her junior, who told his age frankly, and invariably added the unparsable fact that he was a score of years younger than Hepzibah—her ring-doves, a tame white rat with pink eyes and a pink tail; a new Persian cat, that Bettina did not regard with favourable eyes; told how she went three times a week to the Rector's to learn Latin, and dabble in the classics; how she visited the cottagers, &c., &c., and how many new gowns she had, and how she loved finery.

Adèle listened to it all, regarding Helène fondly; and then, as no one said a word about Conrad, or alluded in the most distant manner to her matrimonial misfortunes, she took heart, and by the time tea was set in the quaint parlour, as being a more homely and pleasant meal than dinner, and less like what she had been accustomed to in her foreign home, she was self-possessed, and able to restrain the bitter tears that brimmed to her eyes, and keep them from falling, and paining those to whom she was so dear.

It was all so charming, so familiar, the dear old room with its shoulder-high wainscot, the oaken chairs and sideboard, the wide grate with its bright fire-dogs, the tall, china-laden mantel-shelf, the well-remembered Derby tea set, the big silver teapot and the cream jug in the shape of a cow, which she had covetous in her earliest childhood as a plaything; the cakes, hot and tempting, which the housekeeper used to make in bygone days as treat; the chicks bred by her father, the salads from their own garden, dressed with a peculiarly delicious sauce of Dame's; the

odd-and-ends about, associated with her youthful happy days, all dulled for the time the aches and pain of her heart, and they strove to make her forget those stormy days of her wedded life, and succeeded when she was with them. Only at night alone, in the silence and darkness, her grief and regret broke out afresh, and she would shed bitter tears of shame and sorrow when she thought of the infamous conduct of the man to whom she had given the first love of her young heart.

A woman's affection dies so hard for the man she has chosen, the husband of her bosom, and he has taken much to kill it; and the memory of those dreadful days in Paris yet lingered with her, and the horror of them would make her shrink and quail, and a scarlet blush mount to her brow. To her pure nature her husband's conduct was incomprehensible, and she often wondered was it caused by her, had she shown too little affection!

Once she said something of this to her grandmother; and the clever Frenchwoman, in a few quiet words, showed her how absurd this supposition was, and made her see his conduct in its true light and hideous nakedness, and from that moment she grew calmer and more resigned to her sad fate.

And sad it was indeed! She just twenty, young and beautiful, debarred from all that makes a woman's life worth living—virtually a widow, yet tied, till death parted them, to a dishonourable creature who did not deserve the title of "man"—no home that she could by right call her own, though her father made her so welcome in his house, no prospect of baby voices coming to lighten her sorrow, and children's love and devotion to brighten her declining days. There seemed nothing. A dead blank faced her, a grey future stretched before her, with never the prospect of a gleam of sunlight to brighten the way, or make existence bearable. The wild, fierce storm of her husband's ungoverned passions had wrecked her happiness, and left nought but ruin behind, and a most drear desolation.

Dame would often watch her from her point of vantage—the big chair near the drawing-room window—through a mist of blinding tears, as she walked listlessly to and fro, with down-bent head, and hands hanging limply at her side, her face pale, her eyes heavy with the smart of unshed tears, her whole aspect expressive of dejection and hopelessness totally different, totally changed, from the bright, beautiful girl of two years before. The old lady's wrath was keen and fierce against Conrad Huskisson, and though never mentioning his name to his deeply-wronged wife, constantly urged her son to take legal measures to free his child from such an odious life.

But Leonard Dalziel was firm. He would not drag his daughter's name through the mire of the Divorce Court, from which ordeal he was well aware no woman came out quite free from a taint of suspicion, no matter how innocent and wronged.

Besides, he knew that it was a thing from which Adèle would shrink with horror, against which all the innate purity of her nature would revolt, to have all her brief married life laid bare to the gaze of the pitiless public, all her husband's follies and weaknesses exposed.

It was a humiliation he felt she would never survive, and to spare her he let the man who had injured her so irreparably go free, and escape the just punishment he so richly deserved.

Mrs. Dalziel felt Adèle wanted rousing, and brightening up, that she ought to see friends, go out a little, mingle with the world. Life at the Folly was a dead level, had been since her return from Paris. They had thought at first it would distress her to see anyone, and then her peculiar position obliged them to be very careful that no breath of scandal should get abroad, lest the saddle might be put on the wrong horse, and the innocent one labelled as the guilty.

Still Dame tried to interest her in local matters, and after awhile would ask the Linklaters to come in and take tea with them, because once or twice she had seen the shadow of a smile hover round Adèle's lips at the eccentricities and peculiarities displayed by Miss Linklater,

and the ardent admiration she displayed for the Reverend Septimus Cook, rector of Kestral parish—a gentleman who showed decided sporting propensities, followed the hounds, popped at the partridges, angled in shady streams for the speckled trout, and generally demeaned himself more as a country squire than a parson, albeit he knew well how to wheedle subscriptions out of his flock's pockets.

"Now just look at Hep!" exclaimed Bulwer Linklater, one bright spring morning, as they trooped out of church, to Helène Dalziel, who was a particular friend of his. "There she is, waiting for the parson."

"How do you know she is?" inquired his companion.

"How do I know it? Why, because she always does it, and isn't she standing exactly by the private door leading from the vestry? He can't escape her as he comes out."

"Perhaps he doesn't want to," suggested Miss Dalziel, quietly.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he did," returned the young fellow, with a peal of laughter. "She looks so awfully funny!" with another irresistible chuckle.

"You shouldn't laugh at your sister," proved Helène, but even in her dark eyes there was a gleam of merriment lurking.

"I know, but I can't help it."

This was a fact. His sister was forty-five, swarthy-skinned, black-haired, hard-featured, tall, rawboned, unlovely from the crown of her great mallet of a head down to the sole of her huge splay foot, and yet she thought herself irresistible; forgot she was past girlhood, and decked herself in tawdry finery such as a girl of sixteen might have worn.

The effect was extremely ludicrous, and the absurdity of it always struck her graceless young brother, whose private nickname for her was "Grimy," because he was wont to declare to his cronies Helène that her face looked as though she never washed it.

"Doesn't she look funny, now, in that pink dress?" he went on, staring at the gaudy-coloured, flimsy gown in which the female head of the house of Linklater had seen fit to attire herself.

"The dress is very pretty!" remarked his companion.

"Possibly, in itself. On her you must allow it is simply ridiculous, and out of place."

"The Reverend Sep doesn't seem to think so."

"It is not Hep or her gown that he admires, of that be sure. He is under the impression her purse is heavy."

"Well, so it is."

"Not as he reckons wealth, my child. I—"

"I am not a child," interrupted Miss Dalziel, with immense dignity.

"No! Let me see, how old are you? Thirteen!" tantalisingly.

"No, sir. I was sixteen last month."

"Really! Quite an elderly female."

"Don't be impertinent."

"I could not be so—to you."

"Indeed! Your remark surprises me. There is mother beckoning. We must go."

"Is the Reverend Sep. going to dine at the Folly to-day?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then we can leave Hep. to bring up the rear with him. He will be all right under her protecting and motherly wing."

"Of course."

"How well Mrs. Huskisson is looking to-day!" he remarked, glancing at Adèle, who was walking between her father and grandmother, her beautiful golden hair contrasting with the black hat and dress she wore.

"She is always lovely, I think," said her sister, enthusiastically. "Time seems to stand still with her, and treat her kindly. She does not look much older now than she did six years ago, when she stood a bride at the altar there," with a backward movement of her head towards the quaint Tudor church.

"Ab, yes, I remember her then. You are right. She is just as beautiful now—even more

so, with that fascinating shade of melancholy about her," and again his eyes strayed to and lingered on the graceful figure in front—lingered so long, in fact, that Hélène felt a pang of jealousy shoot through her heart.

"Have you heard we expect our cousin to-day?" she asked, after a pause.

"Yes. Colonel Pierpoint, isn't it?"

"Yes. Do you remember him when he was here for Adèle's wedding, six years ago?"

"Let me see! I think I do. A tall, dark, taciturn fellow, wasn't he, with a splendid figure?"

"Yes. He is quite a hero now, you know. Won the Victoria Cross in Egypt."

"Indeed! Then all you young ladies will be falling in love with him," said Balwer, and it was his turn now to feel a twinge of jealousy.

"Of course we shall," she returned, airily, delighted at having an opportunity of teasing him.

"I shan't like that," he announced.

"Nobody will care a fig for that," she retorted, saucily, as she closed her crimson sun-shades with a rustle, and ran up the marble steps of the Folly.

"Has Colonel Pierpoint arrived?" inquired Mr. Dalziel.

"Not yet, sir," returned the butler.

"Where are you going, Adèle?" questioned Dama a few moments later, as her elder granddaughter appeared, sunshade in hand, and went towards the door.

"To the shrubbery, Dama," she answered, in the low, soft tones of hers, in which was such a ring of melancholy. "Do you want me?"

"No, my darling!" with a fond kiss. "Go. It will do you good to be out in the sunshine."

And certainly it was tempting out there under the trees, where the sunrays fell in chequered patches on the green sward, as it filtered through the budding leafage, and the daisies shook their silver frills amid the springing grasses, and the buttercups were peeping forth, and in secluded corners knots of violets shed their fragrance on the soft air, and the birds twittered and warbled as though rejoicing in the fine weather.

It was a favourite spot with Adèle. Many and many an hour had she passed there, ruminating, dreaming, wondering at the quiet drifting life she spent now—the dull level of monotony, the almost invariable routine of daily life at the Folly, the utter absence of excitement, or whirl, or bustle; the restful quiet, to which she had been a stranger during her brief married days, and that therefore she was well able to appreciate now that true domestic love and affection was hers once more. She wished for nothing more than she had. She was quite content to be as she was, and to live over again, as it were, in her young sister, in whom she took the liveliest interest, and for whose sake during the past year she had mastered her repugnance to seeing and visiting friends and acquaintances, and went with her as *chaperon* to many places, as Mrs. Dalziel was unequal to such fatigue.

She always sat with the matrons on these occasions—never joined or participated in the dancing, tennis-playing, or anything of that sort, and invariably wore black. This only enhanced her fair, fragile style of beauty, and she was a *chaperon* who gained quite as much admiration as any *débutante* in her teens, an admiration which she neither sought nor desired. Love, happiness, were not for her, and she told herself when Hélène was married she would give up the little going out she indulged in, and devote herself entirely to her grandmother and father.

She was entirely devoid of vanity, and she had no idea that she made a very pretty picture strolling slowly over the springy emerald turf, under the shade of the giant oaks and copper beeches, her graceful black draperies floating around her, the two dogs—the tiny Paro and the huge Louviers—pacing after her. Yet, to the longing eyes of the man who stood that sunny day behind a clump of bushes watching her she was just the sweetest, fairest thing he had ever gazed at; and he felt he would have been content to stand there for all eternity, feasting his eyes on her loveliness.

But, at last, with a sigh, as she turned once

more, and came slowly towards his place of concealment, he stepped forward and went to meet her.

"Cousin Tracy!" she exclaimed, with a sweet smile, holding out both hands, and letting the sunshade drop unheeded to the ground. "You have come, then?"

"Yes," he returned, taking her fingers in his warm, close clasp. "I have come. Did you expect me to-day?"

"We did, indeed, and I should have been disappointed had you not come."

"Thanks!" he said, gratefully, casting a wistful glance at the beautiful pensive face. "It is so charming to a wanderer like me to meet with such a warm welcome."

"That is one reason why it should be warm. We seldom see you."

"True. It is six years since I was here." As he spoke the soft colour in her cheeks flickered an instant, and then fled, leaving them white as snow. "And I have been in many places, witnessed many dreadful scenes since then," he added, quickly, to repel the mistake he had made, for he saw her thoughts turned back to that unlucky wedding-day when she gave her hand, plighted her troth to a rascal.

"You—have—seen—much—service—since then?" she said, with a perceptible effort.

"A great deal. I am glad of the long leave of absence I have obtained."

"You have gained the Victoria Cross, I hear?" she remarked, lifting her soft, sad eyes to his sunburnt face, and regarding him with reverence and admiration.

"I have," he agreed, briefly, feeling for the first time glad of the distinction bestowed upon him, since it won him such a look from her.

"You will be eager to win more honours!"

"No. On the contrary, I am tired of warfare, and am thinking of sending in my resignation."

"Not seriously?" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, seriously. I want rest now. I seem to long for a quiet, uneventful life, full of calm happiness. I am weary of the bustle and stir of a military career."

Yet, as he spoke, he felt that peace, love, content were not for him, since he could never find perfect peace in this world unless the woman at his side was his wife—his loving wife!

"You are young for that," she said, thoughtfully.

"Five-and-thirty, scarred and seamed," touching his forehead, crossed by a sabre cut, and his ear, part of which had been shot away, "and turning gray." Lifting his hat and disclosing the crisp, dark hair, lined here and there with white threads.

"You don't look old, nevertheless!" she smiled.

"I feel so."

"You must shake off that feeling."

"I shall have more chance of doing that here than elsewhere. This is home to me," as they entered the hall, and he looked once more on dented shield and rusted spear, on the foxes' heads and the deer's antlers, and the other familiar, well-remembered objects.

"Then you must make a long, long stay with us!" she said, brightly.

"I should like nothing better," he returned; only as he spoke he thought that he would not dare to make a long stay, or linger in her fascinating society.

She was not for him! And with a sigh that rose from the bottom of his heart he followed her into the drawing-room, where Mr. Dalziel and his guests were assembled, awaiting the Colonel's arrival, and that, to some of them more important event—dinner.

CHAPTER VI.

TRACY PIERPOINT received a warm welcome from his relatives, and a flattering one from their friends, especially the charming Hepzibah, who had known him as a boy, and presuming on that fact attached herself to him closely, and bored him all day with innumerable ridiculous

questions that nearly drove him mad, while the Reverend Sep. made hay while the sun shone, and talked away to Mrs. Huskisson, impressing upon her the fact that a bazaar got up for the benefit of his rather tumble-down old church would be a boon and a blessing not only to him, but to all his parishioners; and believing her to be very wealthy—for of course he was not aware that she did not accept one farthing from her disreputable husband—persuaded her to promise to take a stall, which she did somewhat reluctantly as he told her she would thereby be furthering the interests of religion.

Altogether he was well pleased with his day's work, and went away quite content. Not so, however, were young Linklater and Pierpoint.

The former felt the pangs of jealousy, for his capricious lady-love had devoted herself to her cousin, and shared him with Hepzibah, probably saving him from an attack of brain-fever by doing so; while Tracy was wondering miserably, had he made a mistake in coming to the Folly and putting himself once more under the spell of "His Queen of Hearts," and whether it would be better to go away at once? That would look odd.

What excuse could he give for departing suddenly?

Then they all seemed to think that he had come to stay a long, long while with them—until, indeed, his leave of absence was up and he rejoined his regiment; and whenever he made a weak attempt and spoke of going, they pooh-poohed him, and would not listen to his excuses. And so after awhile he ceased even to make a faint attempt, and let himself drift whithersoever the waves of fate would take him, and was half happy, and wholly miserable, living only in the present, and not daring to look ahead into the future.

Hélène kept him going to a certain extent. She entertained a sort of hero-worship for him, and coaxed and teased him fearfully, much to Balwer's disgust.

She would not listen to him, and the poor young fellow was horribly jealous of the tall, sunburnt soldier, who was making his love forgotten—unintentionally, it must be allowed.

He was afraid to be much alone with Adèle, and therefore responded readily to Hélène's invitations to share all her pleasures and amusements, and steered himself against Mrs. Huskisson's plaintive looks, which she bent on him because she little knew the heartaches she caused him, and wondered at his coldness towards her.

"What are you going to wear at the bazaar?" inquired Miss Dalziel one day, as they sat in the dining-room, making knick-knacks.

"I don't know," returned her sister, indifferently.

"Don't know! You must make up your mind soon."

"There will probably be no need to make up my mind."

"What do you mean?"

"I do not think I shall go to the bazaar."

"Oh, Adèle! You must!"

"I don't see that."

"You have promised the Rector."

"You and Hepzibah can manage the stall."

"That I am sure we can't. We shall never get on without you."

"You must try."

"What a shame, isn't it, Tracy? Oughtn't she to come?"

Mrs. Huskisson, raising her eyes at this minute, found her cousin's dark orbs fixed on her face with a curious expression—one that she failed just then to understand.

"Oughtn't she to come?" repeated Hélène.

"Yes, I think she ought," replied the Colonel, stiffly.

"You mean that! You think I ought?" queried the woman he loved, seriously.

"Yes. You have promised."

"And one should always keep a promise," with a laugh. "Then I will go, as you think it right."

Unconsciously she was learning to lean on his strength, to defer to him, to act as he thought

right, and also she was beginning to feel that the placid waters of her life were ruffled.

She was less content than she had been. A strange unrest, a strange yearning, possessed her, and the day before the bazaar she expostulated with Hélie because of the way in which she treated Bulwer Linklater, a thing she would probably not have done save for this new half-sweet, half-bitter feeling that was stirring within her breast.

"Hélie, are you not cruel?" she began, gently, looking up from the smoking-cap she was finishing off.

"Cruel! To whom?" asked her sister.

"To Bulwer Linklater."

"Has he complained to you of my treatment?" she inquired, with knitted brows.

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then why do you champion his cause?"

"Because I know he loves you, and the rebuffs you give him must pain him greatly."

"Nonsense. I don't believe he does care for me."

"Oh! Hélie."

"No, I think most people detest me," she declared, a haughty look on her cold face.

"He does not."

"At any rate his sister does, and all her cronies."

"You see you are handsome. You outshine them."

"Thanks for the compliment. I can hardly help that though, can I?"

"No. Still, dear, you might try to conciliate your acquaintances."

"Hardly? I am not meek enough for that!"

"'Tis goeth before a fall" sometimes, Hélie.

"You mean by that—?" she queried, a contemptuous light in her dark eyes.

"That you may grow to care for someone some day as dearly as Bulwer now cares for you and with as little hope."

"That is not likely."

"You don't mean to marry him, then?"

Mrs. Hukinson put this question with considerable hesitation.

"I have no intention of doing so at present. He is much too good for me."

"Then is it not a pity to have encouraged him, dear?"

"I think he has encouraged himself. His rest-roll is fascinating to a woman of my mind—that is all."

"Don't do yourself such an injustice. Surely you would not do such a dreadful thing as to marry for money!"

"It is better to do that sometimes than to marry for love," she retorted, quickly. Then seeing how ashen pale her sister's beautiful face grew at this thrust, she threw her arms round her neck and begged for forgiveness.

"Don't say a word, dear!" replied Adèle, hurriedly. "I spoke because I thought you were growing to care for—for—Tracy, and that is no use. He is not a marrying man. He could never return your affection."

"How dare you say such a thing!" cried the girl, panting with anger, her eyes flashing, her cheeks crimson, as she pushed her sister's clinging arms away, and sprang to her feet.

"I—I—only—wished—to warn—you," faltered Adèle.

"You take an unwarrantable liberty. I care for such a man! I give my love unsought! And as to warning, let me tell you that you stand on the brink of a precipice. Are you blind—you who have a husband living? Do you not see that Tracy Pierpoint is mad about you, that he adores the very ground you tread on, that he is his idol, his god; the one thing he thinks about by day, and dreams of at night? You—you—to warn me—I—I—"

She turned abruptly away, and walked rapidly towards the door, while Adèle sat horror-stricken, incapable of movement or speech. At the door she turned sharply round, and came back to her.

"Forgive me. I had no right to speak to you like that," she said, hoarsely. "It is of course I dead."

absurd. There is nothing in what I said. It was the outcome of my wounded pride. Think no more about it," and then she went away, and left Adèle alone.

Alone! and yet with a new added load of grief and sorrow. It was all very well to say "think no more about it." How could she help doing so! Her sister's passionate words had torn down the veil that hitherto had obscured her mental vision. She understood many things that before had been a mystery to her—her own unrest and yearning, her cousin's fixed, wistful looks at her, and struggle to avoid her society. It was all plain. He loved her! and she—a crimson blush swept over her face, crimsoning even to the roots of her beautiful hair, as she tried to analyse her feelings, and discovered with a sharp thrill of shame, that Tracy Pierpoint was fatally dear to her; that his departure would take all sunshine, all joy, out of her life.

She got up to seek the solitude of her own chamber, and tottered as she did so. She felt strangely giddy and weak; the blow had fallen crushing on her already sadly-bruised spirit. She had never known such a bitter moment as this, and she had nothing wherewithal to dull the pain gnawing at her heart. She stood there forlorn and despairing—grief-stricken, shame-stricken, that she, a wife, should have let her unruly affections wander from their proper channel, though he who should have guarded her from such a miserable fate had, by his guilty conduct, exposed her to the temptation, left her unguarded and uncared for, to face such trials as beat her could—alone! As she stood there, white, wan, trembling, the door opened, and Colonel Pierpoint entered.

At the sight of him she turned instinctively, seeking to fly from him, and still giddy, reeled and would have fallen but for the support of his strong arm.

As he held her for a brief moment she felt his heart beat tumultuously against her arm, and at each wild throb an answering thrill ran through her.

"Adèle, what is it?" he asked, tenderly, "what ails you?"

"The heat," she muttered, faintly, striving to release herself from the arm that clung to her waist.

"Let me help you to the sofa," he suggested, pitiful of her efforts to get free; and supporting her there, he arranged the pillows for her head, and reaching a palm-leaf from the mantel-shelf, fanned her gently, looking meanwhile at her ill-white face with beaming, passionate eyes.

"What can I get for you?" he queried, when at last she unclosed her eyes, keeping them fixed on the carpet though.

"Nothing—thank—you—I am better—now," she answered, brokenly, with trembling lips.

"Let me put some of this to your forehead!" and shaking some essence on to his handkerchief he held it gently to her face.

"Thank you!" she murmured, gratefully.

"You have been doing too much," he said, after a pause.

"Yes," she agreed, faintly.

"Working late and early to get these things finished!" touching the smoking-cap and other knick-knacks lying on the table close at hand.

"Yes, we have worked hard," she acquiesced, glad of any excuse that might keep him from guessing at the wretched truth.

"You are not strong, and coupled with the extreme heat it has overcome you. You won't be able to go to-morrow unless you rest for the remainder of to-day."

"I can rest!" she said, quickly, thinking that she might escape seeing him for the rest of the day by remaining in her room. "Everything is ready!"

"I am glad to hear it. It seems to me that it is regular hard labour preparing for these trumpery fancy fairs!"

"They do good," she expostulated.

"I hope so. Only I want you to promise me one thing," he went on, taking her hand in his, and wondering at its icy coldness and limpness. It was just like the hand of one newly

"What is that?" she asked, tremulously, not daring to meet the gaze of those dark eyes that she knew were fixed upon her.

"I want you to promise that you will not go to-morrow unless you feel much better—quite equal to the fatigue and bustle of it all."

"It will look so marked if I stay away," she objected.

"Not if you are indisposed."

"I must try to do so. I shall be quite well by to-morrow!"

"Then you won't give me the promise?" he said in tones of the deepest disappointment.

"I will if you wish it. But it is only a passing faintness. You will see," with a poor attempt at cheerfulness and a smile, "how gay and well I shall be breakfast!" and then collecting herself with a strong effort she got up, and waiving him an adieu went slowly out of the room up to her own little nest, and, when there, she flung herself face downwards on the bed and wept out her heart's sorrow unrestrainedly.

CHAPTER VII.

"How are you getting on? Can I do anything for you?"

Colonel Pierpoint asked the question of Adèle the next day, as he sauntered up to her stall, which was the prettiest and best filled of any in the long Kestrel school-room where the bazaar was being held.

"I am getting on very well, thank you!" she replied, quietly, not looking at him, only bending busily over the parcel she was tying up for a customer.

"Have you recovered from your indisposition of yesterday?"

"Oh, yes, quite."

"You still look tired," glancing at her face, which was nearly as white as her pretty old-fashioned frilled gown that she and all the stall-keepers wore, and big plumed hat to match.

This costume suited her admirably. She had never looked more lovely, more witching, more fragile, more likely to charm a man's heart from his keeping—make a fool of him; make him forget everything but her beauty; and Colonel Pierpoint standing beside her, for all his quiet demeanour, felt his pulses throbbing, and his veins tingling with the mad, wild passion that filled his whole being for this sweet, pathetic-faced woman.

"Do I!" she returned, carelessly, trying to steady the fingers that somehow would tremble.

She was trying to be brave, trying to fight this hard battle silently and steadfastly, to gain victory when there was little chance of victory—likelihood only of inglorious, perhaps shameful, defeat. She fought desperately with her pulses she listened to his voice—that voice that had all unknown grown so dear to her, wrestled with her desire to look at him, to once more gaze on the dark face whose every lineament was indelibly engraved on the tablet of her heart.

"Yes. You might be called the lily maid, you are so white."

"Really? What a pity I haven't a little rouge. Do you think they sell it at any of the stalls?" she went on, trying to hide her embarrassment.

"I should think not—but I'll go and see if you like. Do my best for you."

"Thanks. Will you really?" she said, rather eagerly.

"You seem to want to get rid of me," he observed, with some pique and annoyance.

"Do I!"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"Well, you see you are tall and broad, and take up a good deal of room, and perhaps keep purchasers off," with a terrific effort to appear indifferent.

"I see. You are nothing but a saleswoman today."

"Of course not."

"You seem to have sold most of your things," with a glance over the stall, denuded of many of its most attractive wares—for Adèle had charmed sovereigns and five-pound notes

out of masculine pockets in a perfectly marvellous fashion.

"I have tried to do my best for the restoration fund."

"And have succeeded admirably!"

"Pretty well. I have some nice things left still," she remarked, pointedly, as she handed the parcel to her customer who departed, and looked for the first time at her cousin.

Their eyes met. There was something in hers he had never seen there before. It puzzled him.

"You are not content with having already done a most thriving trade!" he smiled.

"No. I want to dispose of all my things. Are you going to make any purchases, Tracy?"

How he loved to hear his name on her lips.

"Of course I am," he returned, promptly. "Pray let me have the prettiest things you have left."

"Here is a tea-cosy," holding up a gorgeous blue satin affair.

"I will take it. It is most useful to a bachelor."

"Here is an afternoon tea-cloth, embroidered with forget-me-nots, that will match the cosy."

"Yes; I must have that also. Forget-me-nots are my favourite flowers."

Again their eyes met, and again a glance passed between them full of a subtle, intangible something that neither had ever noticed before.

"Here are some d'oyleys," she went on hurriedly, "a blotter, three pincushions, a lace pillow-cover, and a pair of slippers, worked by Hélène!"

"I will have all those, please."

"What are you looking for?" she demanded, as he began to turn over the few remaining things.

"A smoking cap."

"I think I have sold them all."

"Even the black velvet one embroidered with scarlet?"

"I am not sure. Why do you want that one in particular?"

"Because you worked it," he returned, in low tones.

In a second the crimson blush swept up over her face, and she turned aside to hide it, but he was watching her with those dark, sombre eyes, and noted it with a half thrill of triumph.

"Here it is!" as he unearthed the treasure he sought. "Put it up with the other things, please."

Silently he watched her as she deftly packed his purchases up.

"Now come and have some tea," he suggested, when the last knot was tied.

"No, I can't," she answered, hastily.

"Why not?"

(Continued on page 305.)

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE next day every sign of frost had disappeared, and Nella bounded out of bed, determined not to let any troubles of the heart interfere with her enjoyment of her first day with the house.

Unconscious of the plans which were being discussed down the corridor, she performed her toilette with exceeding care. Her hair was curled so well in a shining coil that there was no chance of its disgracing her by falling down.

Her habit fitted her to perfection, and set off her delicately rounded figure to the best advantage. Her hat was especially becoming.

The only thing needed to give the necessary finish was a tiny bunch of violets, and that she hoped to receive from anyone but Godfrey Somerville.

If he had not come between them last night it might all have been right with Cyril by this time.

Who could tell what the day might bring forth as they waited together by the cover side?

"If Mr. Mallon were not so outrageously ugly

I would try to make Cyril jealous! But I'm afraid it's no use; he would know there was nothing in it!" with a sagacious nod at her own bright reflection in the looking-glass.

Then she caught up her gloves and hunting-crop, and ran downstairs, late for breakfast, as usual.

There were several hunting-men standing about the hall, and amongst them Vere and Somerville, each looking his best in short coats and white leathers.

After shaking hands with some of them, Nella walked slowly towards the dining-room, where the breakfast was laid that morning, and hesitated before going in.

"Is there anything you want?" asked Godfrey, politely.

"Yes," she said, looking up at Cyril instead of him, "I want a bunch of violets!"

"Then here they are!" and with a malicious smile Somerville took them out of his coat.

"Thank you. I don't want to poach on Meta's preserves," regarding them with anything but gratitude.

"Of course, she is already provided," and he thrust them into her unwilling hand, as Cyril threw open the door.

The other men streamed in from the hall; there were fresh arrivals every moment, and amidst a general clatter of plates and tongues Nella stole quietly into her seat by Lady Somerville's side.

"What is the matter?" whispered Meta, who was on her other side; for the ladies being few in number clung together like timid birds.

"Nothing, except that I had a bad dream," she said, gravely, as she pushed away her plate with a sigh of disgust. "This omelette is very good, but I can't eat it."

"If your nerves are upset you mustn't ride," said Meta, sagely. "Mamma has made me promise not to follow, but Mrs. D'Arcy says she will be your chaperon," looking across the table at a masculine-looking woman, with bright dark eyes and a necktie like a groom's.

"I wish you were coming with me."

"I couldn't. This is the first time the hounds have met here since—" She stopped, but Nella knew that she meant poor Lina's death.

There was a clatter of hoofs outside. A fresh detachment of thirsty creatures poured in, and announced that the hounds had arrived.

"Let us go out and look at them," said Lady Somerville, and the ladies gathered in a knot under the portico. Mr. Mallon was leaning against one of the Corinthian pillars with an air of abstraction.

A score or so of the men about him were well known to him, but he made no sign of recognizing them, and entered into conversation with no one.

His appearance would have been sufficiently sportsmanlike to please Sir Edward's critical eye but for the awkward shape of his shoulders and his ragged beard. His pot hat was drawn down over his eyes, and his head bent, as he tapped his shining boots with his crop.

The Master came out with a grasp of the hand for all old friends, and a kindly nod for the rest. Whilst he was stopping a minute to admire Sir Edward's mount, Somerville came up, and, looking straight into Nella's grave face, asked if she were ready?

"Ready for what?"

"Destruction!"

"Yes," with a sigh, "but not with you."

"You don't like Mr. Somerville?" said a voice close to her ear, and turning round quickly she saw Mr. Mallon by her side.

"I hate him!" and her eyes flashed.

"Will you allow me to disappoint him, and put you on your horse?"

She willingly assented, for Cyril Vere was fully engaged in talking to Mrs. D'Arcy, and seemed to have forgotten her existence. When mounted, he arranged her habit with the utmost care, inquired if her stirrup wanted lengthening, and remained by her side till the Master called out to the "Whip" "Get forward!" and there was a general scrambling into saddles as the hounds moved off.

"They are going to try Carter's spinney first,"

said Godfrey, as Meta came up in the general rush of excited horses. "So you can follow as far as that, and then you had better go quietly home. Buttercup is about as much as you can manage now."

"Yes, but look at Nella; how well she sits, though Limerick is dancing about in a way that would send me into fits!"

"Well enough; but wait a bit till the fun begins. Limerick is anything but a good timber-jumper, and I expect will land her in the first hedge she puts him at."

"Do pray go and warn her."

"That's Vere's business," sullenly. "I wash my hands of her."

"I wonder the Arkwrights haven't come."

"They are to turn up at the spinney."

"But how could they know we should be there?"

"I suppose the whip whispered it to Jack."

Vere meanwhile was riding on ahead of the rest, his heart for once not full of the morning's sport. He was thinking of Dulcie Arkwright instead of the "vixen" who was to lead them, if she only would not be so perverse as the rest of her sex, over the yew-hedge which skirted the grounds of Nun's Tower—of Dulcie, who without the least preparation was to meet the lover from whom she had been parted for years.

It was like a gathering in the time of the Jacobites, when the chase was a mere pretext, and the real morning's work was more dangerous to the heads of the sportsmen than to the fox. If Mallon were discovered, general disgrace would fall on them all; and if they failed to find anything out at the Tower, they might only put Somerville on his guard, and make any further attempt impracticable.

Vere felt like a commanding officer on the eve of a battle. He was weighed down with a sense of heavy responsibility; every look and word had to be guarded, for fear lest either should betray that there was something more serious in the wind than a day's sport; and yet there was Mallon, whose every hope in life depended on success, chatting as calmly as possible with his own most provoking cousin.

The spinny was reached. "Hulck, in there! Get to cover!" shouted the whip, and the hounds scrambled eagerly up the broken bank, and disappeared amongst the withered bracken.

A few minutes of anxious expectation, whilst horses fidgeted, eager for a start; and the silence was only broken by the too-toeing of the hounds' horns, and the crack of a whip, to check the wanderings of some refractory hound who refused to settle down to work.

Nella suddenly missed Mr. Mallon from her side, and, looking round to see what had become of him, perceived Cyril Vere going towards the end of a lane, up which two people, whom she concluded to be Miss Arkwright and her brother, were riding. Cyril seemed to have something especially to say to her, for the brother was seen on in front, and he was soon engrossed in exchanging "Good-mornings" with his friends.

Watching intently she saw Cyril turn round and beckon to Mr. Mallon, who rode up at once, as if he had been on the look-out for the signal. Evidently an introduction followed, for Miss Arkwright bowed, and Mr. Mallon bared his shaggy head. Then an earnest colloquy ensued, as if those three had the affairs of the nation to discuss, and Nella's heart was pricked by a jealous pang.

Presently they passed her, riding slowly, but still talking in lowered voices; Cyril looked round and smiled.

"Take care of yourself, Nella. I suppose you are going home with Miss Somerville?"

She did not answer him. If he did not care even to offer her a lead, or to take the smallest interest in her proceedings, she would let him see that she could do without him.

"Meta has gone home, like a sensible girl," said Godfrey Somerville, coming up on Pearly, whom he managed to perfection. "Miss Arkwright has got that odd fellow Mallon in tow, as well as your cousin."

"Hiresees are always well attended!"

"I thought the best attendant for mine was groom," he said, with a short laugh.

"Exactly; you wished to keep her alive for another day. People are not reckless with those they value."

"No, and that I suppose is why I let you stay without remonstrance," looking at her with a peculiar smile.

"You know it would have had no effect!" contemptuously.

"None at all; but for conscience sake I might have made it."

"I did not know you had one."

"I am proving it now."

"How!"

"By taking care of you against your will. It won't be due to your cousin's care, but mine, if you reach home without broken bones. Hark! they're off!" he exclaimed, excitedly, as a wild halloo broke on their ears. "Now keep close, but beware of her heels," as he put the mare at the bank, and landed in the wood. Limerick followed; but it was as much as Nella could do to keep him at all in hand—his ears kept twitching uneasily, and he was trembling all over with excitement.

"Hark, forward!" shouted the hoarse voice of the huntman.

"Get together," growled the whip, slashing after Sunflower and Lady Blanche; and then with a merry peal the hounds broke out of cover, their white sterns waving in the sunshine as they stooped to the scent and followed the old grey vixen, who was stealing away across the open to where she knew of a shelter in the hollows of the woods at Deepden.

The hounds were going at a rattling pace, and the field came streaming after them—Jack Arkwright and the Master close after the pack, Mrs. D'Arcy well in front of most of her admirers, Sir Edward on a horse that looked all over going, keeping just ahead of Godfrey and Nella, in blissful ignorance of the latter's presence; Miss Arkwright, Cyril Vere, and Mr. Mallon rode rather to the left of the rest; Dulcie's face was as pale as death, and her lips were closely pressed together.

Life or death seemed to hang on the success of this morning's ride, and as her good horse Brakespeare carried her over the grass in a swinging gallop, her heart was ready to burst with hope or fear.

It was happiness sufficient for one of the three to be by her side after the vain longing of empty years, to look at her lovely face, and feel the answering sweetness of her smile. He felt that go back he couldn't to the skulking existence of the past; if he failed in this, his last wild effort for hope and happiness, all he could ask of the future was a corner in which to die.

"How far!" she breathed rather than spoke, and Cyril could only guess what the question might be, so answered according to his lights.

"About three miles; but at this rate we shall be there in no time. There's a ditch at the end of the field—look out!"

The warning was far from unnecessary, for Miss Arkwright awoke uncomfortably in her saddle, and it was only Shakespeare's instinct that carried himself and his mistress safely over the obstacle.

"They are making for the Tower," cried Vere, rising in his stirrups to get a better view. "Some of them are scrambling through the hedge. No; they are turning the other way. Miss Arkwright you must fall—there must be an accident—and then, don't you see, we can carry you in. By George, it's a pity to lose such a run," he added, with a sigh.

"You go on," said Mr. Mallon. "We can manage it without you. Tighten your reins a little," to Dulcie, as they saw a kid-fence just in front of them. "Hold up, for Heaven's sake!" he shouted, as horse and rider came tumbling down with an awful crash amongst the briars." In an instant he was off his own horse, and standing with outstretched arms over the dry ditch into which Dulcie had fallen.

"We must pull the poor beast out first," said Vere, practically.

With immense difficulty they extricated Brakespeare, and made him stand on his hoofs instead of sending them up straight in the air, I coat,

and then Mr. Mallon stepped down into the ditch and lifted Dulcie tenderly in his arms.

The tears were running down his cheeks, as he subsided on to a tuft of dead bracken, with the white face of the girl he had loved so long and so hopelessly pillowled on his heart.

"My darling! my own little Dulcie!" he murmured, brokenly, and past and future seemed merged in the agony of the present; "speak to me—only speak."

But there was no answer from the lips which he kissed so passionately—no answer from the eyes which were the only stars in the night of his gloom-stricken life.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Come, cheer up, old fellow! You know this is just as we planned it; only the accident was to be a sham one, and not so bad as this. Shall I go on and thunder at the gate?"

"Just as you like," said Mr. Mallon, hopefully.

Success seemed nothing to him so long as Dulcie's eyes were closed.

Vere, having secured the horses as well as he could, skirted the yew-hedge till he came to a gate. It was locked with a key as well as a bolt, as he soon found out when he climbed over it.

He called out, but no one answered, so he proceeded calmly to take it off its hinges. Fortunately the wood was rotten, and gave way without much difficulty.

No one came forward to stop him, and he threw down the barrier between Nun's Tower and the outer world with a sigh of satisfaction. It seemed like a dream that the object for which he had plotted and planned was so easily accomplished.

The road made clear, he hurried back to his friend.

"It is all right. Shall I get a hurdle to carry her on?"

"No, I will do it myself," trying to rise with his heavy burden, but falling back.

"At least I must help you."

Mr. Mallon was jealous of a touch, but as it was impossible to sit there for ever, he was obliged to put up with it.

With some difficulty they managed to carry her between them across the field, over the fallen gate, into the private ground. There was a seat by a clump of evergreens on which they laid her down, Mallon sinking on to his knees the better to support her head. As it rested on his shoulder, and her bright hair touched his cheek, a thrill shot through his heart, and he forgot everything in the world except the sweet face so near his own.

"Let me stay with her whilst you go up to the house."

Mallon shook his head.

"But you would do so much more good than I. If I saw Miss Somerville I shouldn't know her."

"Do you think I've no heart, man," broke out the lover, fiercely; "that I can think of myself when I don't know if she's dead or alive!"

"Pon my word, I think it's only a fainting fit; but if you won't go, I must," and, with a shrug of his shoulders, Vere walked off, delighted to do anything for a friend, but feeling like a martyr because he had lost the end of the run, and left Nella to the tender mercies of Godfrey Somerville.

The grey tower looked as uninviting as ever, and Vere gave an involuntary shudder as he gazed curiously at its barred windows. Not a single creature seemed to be moving about the place till he woke the echoes by a loud knock at the iron-clamped door. Then about twenty startled swallows flew out of their nests in the ivy, and a black cat came creeping from under a dark hedge, and stared at his presumption.

Presently a key was turned in the lock, and the door opened a few inches. A woman, with a large, stolid face, put her face through the aperture, and stared at the unexpected apparition of a good-looking young man in a hunting coat,

"What do you want?" she said, surly.

"A lady has fallen from her horse," he began in his most conciliatory manner; "and I want to bring her in here."

"Then you can't. There's no doctors here, and no nothing. You had better take her somewhere else."

"But surely you will let us bring her in and lay her on a sofa?" peering over her head, but seeing nothing except a stone wall.

"I shan't let you do nothing of the sort," trying to shut the door, but he advanced his foot so as to make it impossible to do so without crushing his toes.

"Please take my compliments to your mistress," trying another tack.

"I ain't got no mistress."

"To your master, then, and ask his permission; surely he could have no objection to helping a lady in distress!"

"Master's not at home," with a grim smile.

"Then if the house is empty!"—slipping a half-sovereign into her hand.

"I never said it was empty," and she flung the piece of gold on to the stone step.

"Is there a daughter or a sister?" eagerly, feeling that the next moment the mystery might be elucidated.

"Whether there be or there beant is nought to you," and she made an unavailing effort to slam the door.

"Give me a glass of water, then; you can't refuse me that."

"Never knew anyone like you," she grumbled; "there's no getting rid of you."

"I never knew such an inhospitable house," he said, angrily.

"Perhaps you didn't, but it's better outside than in, so leastways you've got the best of it. I'll get you the water—no harm in that. There was a lady come more than a year ago, but she was quite content with the harbour."

"How did she come?" the blood rushing into his face.

"She fell from her horse. They never do it unless there's a gentleman to pick them up, though," with another grim smile.

"And who brought her?"

"Somebody as seemed mighty glad to get her; but she was in a fidget all the while to get away, from what I've heard. Take away your foot and I'll fetch the water."

"It was Mr. Somerville, I suppose?"

"No, sir, it warn't," looking him straight in the face, with her stony, light eyes.

"My good woman, I'm so tired, just give me a chair," leaning against the door-post as if about to drop down unless supported.

"The steps make a seat for them that like it," and she slammed the door in his face.

"I never knew such an obdurate woman in my life," he soliloquized in angry disappointment, stooping to pick up the half-sovereign that she had despised. As he bent his head a window opened softly, a white arm was stretched out, a crimson paper flower dropped down on the crown of his hat, and rebounded on to the stones. He raised his head quickly but saw nothing. A window was shut down violently, and as he was staring at it with all his eyes the door opened, and the woman with the stalwart figure put out her head.

"If you will please to go back to the lady, I will bring you the water and a glass of wine."

"Who was it sent me this flower?" sticking it in his coat.

"My little girl," she said, promptly, and before he could say anything more the door was shut.

"Your little girl be hanged!" he muttered to himself, as he walked disconsolately away. "Don't believe you have one—don't believe that there's a man alive who would have the courage to marry you!"

When he got back to the seat Dulcie was sufficiently recovered to put her feet to the ground, but Mallon was still kneeling by her side, and supporting her with his arm round her waist. Their lips met in one long clinging kiss, which said more than a volume of words. After years of hopeless longing heart spoke to heart at last.

"I'm a brute to let you love me," he whispered; "a miserable, degraded outcast; but, if you only knew how I had hungered for a sight of you all those wretched days and nights!"

And she only clung to him the tighter, because she knew that they must part.

"Dulcie, dearest!"—his voice grew grave and calm, though his lip quivered. "I'm not so selfish as to wish to spoil your life for ever. If I fall you must forget me—and—if you get to like anyone, dear, marry him. Wherever I am, alive or dead, it must be better to know you are happy than crying your pretty little eyes out for me."

Her only answer was to touch his hand with her lips—her heart was too full for speech.

"After this you will never hear of me again. Even if I am alive you will not know it. Think of me as dead—lying in some quiet corner, where no one will know whom the grass covers. It would be better for you, dear, wouldn't it?"—trying to excuse his guilty thought of suicide—"to think that I was at rest, and not in this unbearable state of shame!"

"No! a thousand times no. As long as I know you are well, and not far off, I can bear it. What are you thinking of? If you kill yourself—her lips growing white—"you kill the one hope I can cherish of meeting you in Heaven."

He looked at her very wistfully:

"Heaven is so far off."

"And so are peace and happiness, but we shall get to them at last if we only have patience."

Vere had withdrawn under the shadow of the trees, anxious not to disturb his friend's one brief moment of joy; but at the sound of advancing footsteps, he stepped forward, and raised his hand in warning.

"You have forgotten everything," he said in a low voice, as Dulcie raised her head, and remembered to blush.

"Can you wonder?" asked Mallon, with a sigh, waking up as if from a dream.

"Here comes a woman with a glass of water or something! Could I slip into the house whilst Dul—Miss Arkwright, is drinking it!"

"I don't think so, but you must beat yourself, or the opportunity will be lost. I am delighted to see you are not seriously hurt," turning to Dulcie with a courteous smile, as Mallon disappeared amongst the bushes.

"Oh! no, not hurt," putting her hand to her head as if it ached. "But I ought not to be sitting here; I want to help in some way."

"Hush, lean against me—here she comes! Thank you, my good woman," taking up the glass of wine, and bending over Dulcie with an air of the greatest anxiety as he held it to her lips. "This may do some good, but a sofa would have been better."

"The lady must find that at home. You can put down the glass anywhere—I can't wait."

"Stop a bit," cried Vere eagerly, anxious to detain her under any pretext, whilst Mallon was making his investigations. "You haven't told me to whom I am indebted for this hospitality?"

The woman looked at the decanter of wine and bottle of water which she was holding on a tray with a half-amused, half-contemptuous smile.

"Hospitality's a fine word for this lot, but such as it is you owe it to Sarah Prendergast, but to you. Who is the owner of this house?"

"Mr. Smith."

"A young man with a pale face, and dark hair?" carelessly.

"An old gentleman of seventy-nine, with a fondness for animals," she answered, stolidly, as if repeating a lesson, and then turned away.

"One moment, I've a cruse for animals myself."

"What sort?"

"Horses, dogs!" watching her face to see if it changed. "Cats, ferrets, rabbits, cows, pigs!"

"No, we've none of that lot," walking off.

"Stop a minute. Lions are great fun, and a pet giraffe is splendid."

"We don't keep 'em," with a contemptuous sniff over her shoulder.

"Mrs. Prendergast!" said Dalele, softly. The woman turned half round, but bent her head sideways as if she were listening to something else. "Could you tell us the shortest way to get to Swinburne?" mentioning the first name that occurred to her.

"Never heard of it."

"But you know Copplestone?"

"Yes, first turning on the left after you pass the—"

The sentence was never finished, for down went the tray on the grass, the decanter and bottle knocking each other over like a pair of nine-pins, as Prendergast ran at full speed towards the house.

"Now's the time," said Vere, and he rushed off in pursuit.

Dulcie sprang to her feet, clasping her hands over her throbbing heart. In another moment, Victor's name might be cleared and his long martyrdom ended. Her lips moved in prayer; and overcome with the thought of the crisis, her knees knocked together in uncontrollable agitation. What was happening she could not see, and the silence was unbroken by a sound. Suddenly there was a rustle in the bushes behind her, and a woman's voice said softly: "Victor—I am waiting."

An electric thrill shot through her heart. Who could be calling him but poor little Robbin Somerville? She turned round, but there was nothing to be seen.

Trembling all over with excitement she ran to the other side of the bench, and plunged into a bed of evergreens from which the voice seemed to have come; but before she had taken two steps, when everything was depending on her speed, she caught her foot in the skirt of her habit, and fell violently to the ground!

CHAPTER XVIII.

In a gaily furnished room, with pink curtains, bright blue paper, and crimson carpet, sat a girl threading beads on a string of yellow ribbon.

The occupation seemed a trivial one for any one beyond the age of childhood, and the wild, wistful eyes had an unsettled, dissatisfied expression, as if ever on the look-out for something which was not there.

Her long hair streamed over her shoulders, kept loosely together by a red ribbon, a sash of the same colour was tied round her waist, and a bright yellow bow was perched on her shoulder.

The dress was white, and made in the simplest fashion, only a frill round the edge of the skirt, and a lace tucker at the neck. The sleeves were short, and displayed a pair of arms which had been lovely once, but now had lost their rounded shape through excessive thinness. As she put one bead on after the other, she murmured to herself some foolish rhyme:—

"Love me when the gorse is yellow!
Love me when the sun is bright!
Love me when the fruit is mellow!
Love me in the still, dark night!"

Stopped, sighed, and went on again with constant iteration.

Suddenly her hands dropped on the table, and she raised her head as if listening intently. Her whole being seemed to be absorbed in the effort of straining her attention. As the voices continued down below she got up from her chair, and stole stealthily to the window, looking back over her shoulder, as if she were accustomed to have every movement watched.

Her pale face brightened with a ray of hope as she opened the window softly, listening still, but afraid to look out, whilst Sarah Prendergast was at the door; but when the door shut, and the stranger was left alone, she slipped her head through the iron bars, quivering all over with joy.

Had he come at last! A smile was on her lips, her dark eyes full of tears as she stretched out her small white hand, and dropped a paper rose—fit emblem of the dream that had sent her poor wits astray.

"He will look up and see me," she thought,

with a fluttering heart; but even as she thought it a rough hand caught her by the shoulder, and drew her forcibly back into the room, whilst the window was shut down and fastened by a spring the secret of which she had never been able to master.

"How many times am I to tell you?" began the woman, fiercely; but her face softened as the girl clung to her in piteous entreaty.

"Oh, let me go to him! let me go! He's come at last! and I've grown so sick of waiting! Vere, dear, I'll give you a diamond necklace and hundreds of thousands of pounds—only let me go to him this once!"

The tears were rolling down the poor white cheeks, and her breast heaving with convulsive sobs.

"It's nothing but a stranger; no friend of yours. He would only send you back with a fies in your ear if you went down to him. Bide here a bit. He would scold you when you got to him. He's a big, cross man; not like Mr. Godfrey."

"Victor was never cross," shaking her head, sadly.

"But this ain't Victor, bless your heart! This is Thomas, and he got a sweetheart waiting down there amongst the trees. It's bitter cold outside, go and sit ye down by the fire." So saying, she pulled her rather roughly towards a chair, and pushing her into it, drew it nearer to the blaze.

There was a large brass guard, blackened by use, fixed on to the mantelpiece in such a way as to prevent any danger from the fire.

The poor girl, left alone, got out of the chair and crouched down on the hearth-rug, stretching her hands out towards the flames.

"They shan't keep me! I know he's there; no one but Victor would come. I'll make him a watch-chain of diamonds, but not now. He shall be the grandest gentleman of them all, and I'll be his bride. I must be quick,—looking round to see if the room were empty—"he's downstairs; he's come to fetch me—and I must get my jewels."

She scrambled hastily to her feet, and picking up some of the strings of beads from the table twisted them round her wrists. As there was no fastening, they fell off one after the other; she picked them up and put them on again with the same result. After tying it five or six times she gave a hopeless sigh, and taking them in her hand ran out of the room, looking timidly to right and left as if afraid of being seen. But there was no one to stop her as she went lightly down the cold stone stairs and reached the hall. Here she met with her first disappointment, for Prendergast had taken care to secure the door. With her small, powerless hands she tried to move the heavy bolts, panting with eagerness. Victor was outside, and she could not get to him. She felt like the wild bird who beats his wings in futile anger against his cage, as she beat the door in impotent wrath, and only bruised her soft, white skin at the result. Then she ran from room to room, wild with frantic desire; but every door was bolted, every window barred, and there was not a single point of egress by which she could escape. Up the stairs again, down passages, in and out one cheerless room after another, with breathless haste, and wild eyes full of fear and hope. At last she came to a closed door. It led to a room, which she had never been allowed to enter—Prendergast's private apartment. With trembling fingers she turned the handle and went in. Opposite to her was the window, the only one in the house unprotected by bars. It caught her eye at once and she darted towards it with a little cry of triumph. It was rather hard to open, but excitement lent her strength; she pushed up the sash, and sprang out over the sill on to the slated roof of a castellated projection. It was here that she caught Prendergast's eye, when she was talking to Dulcie Arkwright. At the first sight of white skirts flitting in the wind, outside her own window, she made for the house; but finding that she was pursued by Vere she doubled like a hare, and ran in the direction of the arbour where Nella Maynard had enjoyed an involuntary *tête-à-tête* with Somerville last summer year.

Knowing that there were no steps by which the



A GRIM-LOOKING WOMAN PUT HER FACE THROUGH THE DOOR-WAY. "WHAT DO YOU WANT?" SHE INQUIRED, SURILY.

poor prisoner could reach the ground, Prendergast consoled herself with the thought that the only injury her charge could do herself was by catching cold, a malady which she always considered she could cure by tremendously hot mustard poultices.

Robin meanwhile ran hither and thither on the slated roof, peering over the castellated edge, and talking incoherent nonsense to her invisible lover; whilst the man who would have given his right hand to have seen her was groping about at the back of the house, trying to loosen one of the bars of an isolated window, having found the doors all inexorably closed.

"I am coming, love—I am coming. It is twenty years since we met, but I know you want to see me, and I've got all my diamonds ready. The coach-and-four is so late; I can't keep them waiting, or the Archblabop won't marry us. It's rather an odd way of doing it," putting her foot over the edge of the wall, and clinging on to the ivy; "but they've got my wedding dress round the corner, so I can tear this if I like, and Pren isn't looking this way."

With no sense to know her danger, she climbed down the thick stem of the ivy with the agility of a cat, and arrived breathless but unhurt, except for a few scratches and bruises, on the gravel path.

She shook her dress with a little coo-like murmur of delight, and then, frightened by the sudden bound of a trespassing cat, disappeared into the bushes with her finger to her lips, and her dark eyes gleaming with laughter.

"Victor will be so pleased," she murmured, as she made her way stealthily through the branches. "He does not know I am coming; but the kind Archblabop is waiting, and we are to be married in Westminster Abbey. I won't call him, because Pren will hear; but I will kiss him—kiss him softly, as I did in the lanes at home. Oh! 'Love me—love me!' How does it go? I forget; but Victor will tell me—he always tells me everything I want to know," addressing an ivy-grown stump in a confidential

tone. "But he is so clever, with such kind—kind dark eyes, and he's fond of his poor Robin, because he lost her long ago—long ago, just twenty years. A long time to wait; but I must be quick. I think I hear him; I will just creep softly behind him,"—she went on tip-toe over the withered leaves, holding up her short white skirt, and displaying her slender ankles—"and tell him that I love him—dear Victor, who always was so kind!" It was December, and the wind was in the east, but she was not conscious of the cold, as she went slowly onward, hesitating timidly at every fluttering leaf. "I think he is here—just here," and parting the branches she put her small head through them, and said, softly: "Victor, I am waiting!"

Scared at the sight of Dulcie she stumbled back, and fled with the speed of a frightened deer.

If it had not been for Pren she would have seen him long ago; women were all her enemies, and now this one would disappoint her if she could.

On she went, not caring whither, in blind and headlong haste. If she had gone to the right she would have found the man whom she was looking for; but after hesitating for a moment she turned with a radiant face towards the left, where some one was crushing through the branches with haste equal to her own, and sprang with a cry of delight into the arms of Godfrey Somerville.

Then finding out that he was not Victor, she struggled wildly to get free, but Godfrey held her tight.

"Hush, darling!" he whispered. "Keep quite quiet. Victor's over here, and I will take you to him if you don't speak a word."

"Are you sure?" trembling all over, and panting for breath.

"Yes, sure, if you don't speak, and let Pren find you out," looking nervously round, and catching a glimpse of Mr. Mallon in one direction and Vere in another, he hurried her forward, thankful that a former owner had chosen to plant

that screen of evergreens, whose welcome branches hid them from sight.

If Robin had resisted, one scream would have made detection inevitable, and all for which he had planned and plotted for years would have been lost by the sound of a woman's voice; but she followed him as docilely as a lamb, with the unquestioning faith of childhood.

If he would take her to Victor she could be content to follow him to the end of the world; but still an involuntary shiver ran through her slight form, as Godfrey stopped before the door of an old worm-eaten summer-house, which stood in the darkest, dreariest corner of the grounds, and had long been given over to spiders and bats.

"Is Victor here?" she asked, drawing back. "I will send him to you. Wait there till he comes."

And with a gentle push he sent her in, then closed the door behind her, and locked it with a rusty key, which was hidden in the thatch.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, more devoutly than usual, as he stood outside in the darkening day, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "One moment later, and all would have been lost."

(To be continued.)

A SHELL FISH known as the *plana* in the Mediterranean has the curious power of spinning a viscid silk which is made in Sicily into a regular fabric. This silk is spun by the shell fish in the first place for the purpose of attaching itself to the rocks. It is able to guide the delicate filaments to the proper place and then glue them fast, and if they are cut away it can reproduce them. The material when gathered—which is done at low tide—is washed in soap and water, dried and straightened, one pound of the coarse filament yielding three ounces of the fine thread, which, when spun, is of a lovely burnished golden-brown colour.



SIR JASPER CAST HIMSELF AT HAIDÉE'S FEET. "HAVE YOU BEEN PLAYING?" HE ASKED.

REDEEMED BY FATE.

CHAPTER XVII.

WALKING down the marble steps to the smooth, green level of the tennis lawn, Sir Jasper found Haldée and Muriel, in white flannel dresses, resting from their exertions under the leafy shadow of a walnut tree, while Philip stood by, racket in hand, talking to them.

"Have you been playing?" he asked, casting himself at Haldée's feet, and beginning to fan her with a big black fan that had been lying on the turf.

"Yes. Mr. Greville against Lady Urwick and myself. He was unchivalrous enough to beat us!"

"He ought to have been taught better!" said the Baronet, with a laugh. "Don't you know—turning to the artist—"the surest way to a lady's favour is to make her believe you wish her to be victorious in everything!"

"Even if you sacrifice truth in saying so!" demanded Philip.

"Ah! that is nothing! Truth and expediency very seldom join hands."

"I bow to your superior wisdom and experience, Sir Jasper!" answered Greville, deeply irritated by the calm air of possession with which the Baronet had seemed to appropriate Haldée.

Sir Jasper's cold eyes scanned him closely, as if he suspected some double meaning in the remark which he did not respond to.

Turning to Lady Urwick he asked if she cared for a drive, and on her excusing herself, said to Haldée,—

"You will come, Miss Darrell? I have ordered an open carriage to be ready in half-an-hour, and if you have no objection I will take you to see the Grange—the house where you were born."

Haldée acquiesced immediately, and some little time later she drove off with Sir Jasper,

jealously watched by Philip from the staircase window.

What would he not have given to have been seated by the side of his little lady-love, and borne along by a pair of splendid bays through the July sunshine that bathed the whole landscape in its wide, golden radiance!

Little was said by either until they reached a pretty gothic lodge, standing inside a pair of large iron gates, which the groom sprang down to open as an old woman, with a brown wrinkled, weather-beaten face, appeared in the doorway. She dropped a low curtsey to the Baronet.

"So, Mrs. Doyle, you haven't given up your post of gatekeeper, I see!" said Sir Jasper, walking the horses slowly through the gates.

"No, sir, and don't intend to for a good many years yet!" she responded, cheerily. "I still have hopes of seeing the master back at his old home again, though it's so many years since he went away!"

"Does she mean my father?" whispered Haldée, and Sir Jasper nodded assent.

"I am afraid your wish will never be realised."

"I've heard you say so afore, Sir Jasper; but for all that I haven't lost faith," she said, a certain obstinacy latent in her voice. "I dare say you'll laugh, sir; but it's my firm belief that the curse will be lifted from Mr. Darrell's life, and I shall see him hold up his head once more, as he did so many, many years ago!"

The Baronet shrugged his shoulders by way of reply, and touching the horses with his whip, soon reached the top of the neglected, weed-grown approach.

The house was, or rather had been, an extremely pretty one, of white stone, and somewhat fanciful architecture, having a colonnade running its entire length. In the court was a magnificent fountain, with a marble group in the centre, representing Venus rising from a huge shell, but in the place of limpid, flowing water, damp green stalks trickled slowly

down, and the basin itself was entirely overgrown with moss. There were extensive gardens which had once been beautifully laid out, and carefully tended, but now they were nothing but tangled labyrinths of weeds, which flourished triumphantly in the place of the delicate flowers that had formerly blossomed out their sweet lives in the summer sunshine. The gravelled walks were covered with moss, and shadowed by the rank growth of trees, whose boughs had been long untouched by gardener or pruning knife—altogether the scene was one of extreme desolation.

"What a lovely place this could be made!" exclaimed Haldée, as Sir Jasper assisted her to descend. "It reminds me of Shelley's description of the garden where his sensitive plant grew."

"What may that be?" he asked, with a smile; and half to herself, half to him, she repeated those lines of the sweetest, most fanciful poet that ever lived:—

"The garden once fair, became cold and foul—
The rose-leaves, like flakes of crimson now,
Paved the turf and moss below.
The lilies were drooping, and white, and wan,
Like the head, and the skin of a dying man.
And Indian plants of scent and hue,
The sweetest that ever were fed on dew,
Leaf after leaf, day after day,
Were matted into the common clay."

"It is a pity the place has been allowed to fall into this state," Sir Jasper admitted, looking round; "it is some time since I saw it, and in the interval it has gone from bad to worse."

"What could have induced my father to desert such a lovely home!" exclaimed Haldée, involuntarily.

The Baronet looked at her for a moment in silence, then said, gravely,—

"A great grief drove him away—such a one as I pray may never touch you with its dark shadow."

The girl was awed in spite of herself, and a feeling of depression stole over her, as Sir Jasper, having obtained the key of the front door, led

her through suites of silent deserted rooms, where curtains were closely drawn, and the furniture had a queer ghostlike appearance, shrouded as it was in dusty holland coverings. They paused at last in a small pretty apartment, that had been her mother's boudoir.

"It makes me feel sad," she said, turning away to hide the tear that rose to her blue eyes; "it seems to bring closer the sorrow in my father's life."

"The brightness of your own future shall atone for it."

"How can you foretell such a thing? There is no reason why I should be exempt from suffering more than other people."

"Yes!"

"But why?"

"Because you have someone to love, care for and watch over you; to shield you from all the pains and anxieties of life!" he replied, with sudden passion, thinking the time had come when he might declare himself without risk of startling her. "Haldés, darling, haven't you guessed how dear you are to me, and that the one great wish of my heart is to make you my wife?"

He took her hands, and attempted to draw her to him, but she held back, all the sweet red bloom fading from her cheeks, and a grieved amaze in her eyes.

"Is this true, Sir Jasper? I am indeed sorry."

"Sorry, dearest! Why?"

"Because I don't care for you, at least, not in that way."

"But you will in time, Haldés. You are young, and I have not known you very long, still I am willing to wait as long as you wish. I will teach you to care for me, never fear!"

There was a sense of power, of assurance, in his voice that almost frightened the girl, and determined her not to allow herself to be placed in a false position towards him, but to tell him the truth and let him see the impossibility of his wishes ever being realized.

"No," she said, nervously clasping her fingers together, and looking away from him across the moss-grown terrace, and neglected gardens, "it cannot be, Sir Jasper. There is a reason against it."

"And that is?"

"My love belongs to another."

There was a dead silence. Very seldom, indeed, was Sir Jasper Rathven taken at a disadvantage, but this declaration of hers certainly surprised him beyond measure. Who could possibly have won her heart in those mountain solitudes where her young life had been spent?

"Do you really mean this as a fact?" he said, at last, hardly able to realize it.

"Certainly!"—with a little air of offended dignity.

"Then you are engaged, I presume?"

She bent her head assentingly, not daring to glance at the Baronet, whose stern voice gave her some idea of his anger—but far from a full one. Sir Jasper was a man not accustomed to have his wishes thwarted—one to whom opposition only gave fresh ardour.

"Should I be asking too much if I inquired your lover's name?" he said, quietly.

Haldés hesitated.

"I would rather not mention it if you don't mind."

"As you will," he said, his mind fixing with unerring accuracy on the only single man with whom she had been brought into contact—Philip Greville. I suppose your father knows nothing of this?"

"Oh! no."

"That was a needless question of mine, for it is with his permission I ventured to present myself as your suitor, and it is his greatest wish that you should become my wife. Haldés, reconsider what you have said—think how happy I would make you, how devoted I would be. Break off this childish engagement and come to me!"

He spoke ardently, passionately, his persuasive dark eyes burning with fervour, his handsome face bent down until his hot breath fanned her cheek. In good truth he was madly

in love, and all his pulses were beating and throbbing under the excitement of the moment—the intoxication of the girl's radiant beauty.

She drew back, almost terrified at his vehemence.

"Don't say any more, please, Sir Jasper, it is only paining me and yourself to no purpose. Nothing you can urge will alter my decision, for—"her voice thrilling—"It is not a child's love but a woman's love I have given, and as long as I live it can never alter, or be recalled."

Again there was a pause. A very tempest of angry passion was raging in the Baronet's heart, until it almost passed beyond his control, strong as that at all times was. He had made no sure of her, he had had such implicit faith in his own power that the shock of the refusal was doubly bitter, and stung him to the very quick.

Should he give her up—forego this cherished project—crush the passion that had grown and strengthened until now it seemed a part of his nature? No, a thousand times no! By fair means or foul, he must win her!

He came nearer, and laid a heavy hand on her arm.

"Haldés, you force me into a line of conduct that it pains me infinitely to adopt, but I have no alternative. The love I bear you is so strong that it is my master, and I its weakest slave, and marry me you shall! This seems a harsh sort of wooing, and I use a strange tone, you will say. Well, it is justified. I alone of all the world know the secret of your father's life, and for all these years I have kept it most sacredly; but now, unless you consent to my wishes, I swear I will publish it abroad, and on you will rest the blame of condemning him to the scaffold as a murderer!"

Just at first the words fell on Haldés's ears without carrying a full sense of comprehension. Then, as their meaning slowly dawned, she staggered back, a white horror in her face, her eyes dilated, her hands thrown out as if in appeal.

"It is not true!" she muttered, hoarsely—then, casting herself at his feet, "Oh, unsay those cruel words—tell me you have deceived me—anything save that!"

"I have not deceived you, but you would never have known if you had given a different answer to my suit. It is only my love that has forced this assertion from me—"

"Your love!" she interrupted, with bitterest scorn. "It seems to me a strange way of deserting love's holy name."

"Strange or not, it is the only way left me," he answered, a red flush staining his brow. "I do not suppose your filial affection will allow you to sign your father's death-warrant, but unless you marry me I will go and denounce him, and let justice take its own course."

"And I thought you called him friend!"

"Friendship must yield to passion."

She turned away with a gesture full of scorn and contempt, and throwing herself in an armchair near, covered her face with her hands, and did not speak for some moments.

Stunned, shocked, horrified, as she undoubtedly was, there was yet something in the Baronet's manner that convinced her he spoke truly.

She herself had always suspected her father's fits of gloom and despondency to be the result of remorse for some rash act committed in the past, but her greatest fears had never pointed to such a conclusion as this, and the horror of it well-nigh overwhelmed her.

Sir Jasper stood by, moodily watching her. He was man enough to feel some slight degree of shame for what he knew to be an act of black treachery in thus making the father's crime a means of forcing the daughter into a marriage that was hateful to her, but the gratification of his own desires had become so habitual to him that he allowed no scruples of conscience or pity to interfere with them.

At last Haldés raised a miserable white face, and looked at him.

"What proof have I that you do not speak falsely?" she asked in a harsh, strained voice, out of which all the soft, cooing music had fled.

"Appeal to your father for confirmation of my words, and he will not deny their veracity, or stay—I will give you the details, and then you can verify them yourself."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE man Eastace Darrell murdered was my cousin and predecessor, Sir Charles Rathven," went on the Baronet, finding Haldés made no answer to his words. "The two men had had a quarrel of long standing, and one night they met on the cliff, just by the village, and your father pushed Sir Charles over into the sea."

"Then it was not a premeditated crime?" cried Haldés. "Thank Heaven for that!"

"No, it was not premeditated; but it was none the less, murder, and I witnessed the act. I was riding by when I heard loud voices raised in angry altercation, and descended from my horse with the intention of parting the combatants; but before I could reach them Sir Charles had been thrown over the precipice, and was lying on the rocks below—dead!"

Haldés hid her face in her hands, with an irrepressible sadder.

"I was sorry for Darrell, whose remorse was terrible when his passion had had time to cool," continued Sir Jasper, and so I promised to keep his secret, and prevent the honour of his family—which he prized more than life itself—from being stained with so foul a blot. I kept my word, and it was supposed Sir Charles had met his death accidentally; but, after that, your father was a doomed man. He could never free himself from the remembrance of his crime, and so as to get away from the place where it was committed he left his home, and took you, a baby, away to the North. Now you see why he deserted this place, and the reason of his reckless life."

Yes, she did see; and a tide of love and pity welled in her heart. She had no blame for her father—only tenderest compassion for the remorse he was doomed to endure in expiation of a crime committed in a moment of passion, and demanding a life's atonement.

"You were pitiful to him," she said, her voice shaken and trembling. "Will you be less so to me?"

"No, for I will ensure your whole life's happiness—but it must be as my wife!"

"Ab, no!" she cried out, seizing his hand. "Be merciful! Take all my father's wealth—everything you will, only leave me free! I cannot give up my love. Oh, Philip, Philip!"

The Baronet's face hardened, his lips set themselves together with cruel firmness.

"Let us understand each other," he said, coldly. "I am determined on one of the two courses I have mentioned; and tears, prayers, entreaties—nothing will alter my resolve. You have the initiative in your own hands, and so I only ask you to decide."

Poor Haldés! Her very heart was torn with anguish. She could see no ray of light in the dark path through which she must travel.

To give up Philip was like wrenching soul and body asunder, but did not a higher duty than love force her to renounce him, in order to shield her father from the consequences of his crime, and preserve his dreadful secret?

"I have decided," she said at last, in cold, dull tones of despair. "I consent to marry you, but there shall be no hypocrisy in my consent; for I tell you that when I plight my troth to you all the best part of me will die at the altar! My heart—my thoughts—my soul itself belongs to another man; and will belong to him till death takes them!"

Late that afternoon, as Philip was ascending the stairs to his own room, he met Haldés, but so changed from the likeness of her former self—so white, wan, and miserable—that he absolutely started back in amazement.

"Haldés—darling, what is the matter?"

"I wanted to see you," she said, not answering his question, and drawing back as if afraid lest he should attempt to caress her. "All the other

are in their rooms dressing for dinner, so we can go to the library without any fear of being disturbed."

Wondering still more, he silently followed her downstairs, and when they had entered the room she closed the door, and stood against it, pressing her hand to her heart.

"Do you remember your presentiment last night?" she asked, with a shadowy smile, that was infinitely more pathetic than tears. "Well, it was a true one, Philip. Circumstances have arisen to part us as completely as if death had claimed one or the other, and in the future we must meet as strangers. Do you understand—strangers?"

He stared at her as if he thought her mad, and, indeed, to doubt her faith was the very last thing that occurred to him.

"I do not understand," he said, slowly; "what can have happened since last night to cause you to speak thus?"

She caught her breath sharply—what had happened she must keep a profound secret from him as well as from the rest of the world, and the problem that now presented itself was what reason she could give in explanation of her conduct, so as to prevent him from trying to find out the real one.

"Haldée, you are playing with me, trifling with me!" he exclaimed, half angrily, as she remained silent; "but what your motive is Heaven alone knows! I cannot guess."

"Do I look like trifling—does this"—holding up her slim white hand, on whose third finger a circlet of diamonds flashed in the late afternoon sunlight—"look like trifling? No, I am in sober earnest, and I called you in here to tell you that all that has passed between us must be forgotten—must be as if it had never been, for—I am now the betrothed wife of Sir Jasper Ruthven."

Philip Greville was no coward. If he had been a soldier he would ever have been where the battle was fiercest; where danger was greatest; but at these words of Haldée's he turned as white as she herself was, and laid hold of the back of a chair near which he stood, as if for support.

"Is this the truth?" he asked, harshly.

"Heaven's own truth."

"And this is woman's faith!" he groaned, feeling his former troubles dwindling into mere insignificance before this shattering of the bright vision on which all his hopes had been set—towards which all his dreams had tended. "Great Heavens! if an angel had come down from above and foretold such treachery I would have given him the lie—I would have said it was impossible!" He took two steps forward, and pat his hands on her shoulders so as to look into her averted face.

"Was the test of my poverty too great for you?—was it Sir Jasper's wealth and position that tempted you?"

"Yes!" she said, almost with a sigh of relief at the suggestion, which was one that had not presented itself to her before.

He pushed her from him roughly, almost violently.

"And you did not even think it worth while being off with the old love before you were on with the new! Well, I congratulate you as much on your powers of dissimulation as I despise my own blindness in trusting you so completely. Instead of the innocent, pure, unworldly creature I deemed you, you are the most accomplished coquette on Heaven's wide earth!"

Haldée said nothing, but her pale lips quivered, and it seemed to her that if someone had driven a knife into her heart the pain would have been less keen, less intense, than that her lover's accusation gave.

And yet, she told herself, it was better he should believe her false and treacherous—the agony of parting would surely not be so great if he were assured of her unworthiness.

A minute later and Philip was at her feet.

"Haldée! this is some horrible dream—some dreadful mistake! I will not believe your own testimony. I know, in spite of everything, you are sweet and true. Oh! darling, why have you said these things to me?" he cried, a sudden

revulsion of feeling overcoming him at the sight of her sad white face.

She dared not trust herself to look at him; if she had done so her fortitude would have deserted her, and the remembrance of her father, Sir Jasper, and duty would have been swept away.

Making a violent effort she wrenched herself from his clasp, and was gone, while Philip stayed in the library, vainly trying to find the key to the enigma of her conduct.

One minute he believed her own testimony, namely, that the desire of being mistress of Heathcliff Priors had made her false to him; the next he vehemently negatived it, and told himself there must be some cause for her desertion that he did not know of—some secret which she was hiding from him.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAIDÉE's engagement to Sir Jasper was immediately made public, and the young girl received a letter from her father giving his entire approval, and commanding her choice.

As there seemed no reason for its postponement, and the Baronet was very anxious to have the wedding as soon as possible, it was arranged it should take place at Heathcliff in about six weeks' time; consequently it became necessary to see after the trousseau without delay.

Sybille undertook its management, and it was at once put in hand, the house as a natural sequence being thrown into a state of constant excitement with the arrival of parcels, dressmakers, milliners, and the various etiquettes incidental to a ceremony that was to be the talk of the whole county.

Sir Jasper was undoubtedly very proud of his young fiancée, and tried to show his fondness by lavishing on her presents of the most splendid description, all of which she received with a cold sort of gratitude that was hardly more satisfactory than absolute indifference.

A great change had come over Haldée. From a bright, riant girl, with the soft bloom of a wild rose on her delicate cheeks, and the laughter and enthusiasm of eighteen in her blue eyes, she had grown chill, reserved, and self-contained as a Greek statue, and looked at least three years older than when she had first come to Heathcliff.

"Are you made of stone?" Sir Jasper asked her one day when he had brought her a magnificent parure of sapphires, whose azure radiance might have flashed above the brows of an empress, but which she put aside with a few slight words of thanks.

She glanced up quickly.

"I sometimes think my heart is turned to stone," she answered, involuntarily, and he rose from his chair and gazed through the window.

"I wish Pygmalion had made known the secret by which he warmed Galatea into life," he exclaimed, at length, with attempted playfulness, as he came to her side, and placed his hand on the golden wealth of her sunny hair. "Is there no spell by which I can win your love—no charm to force you to care for me?"

"Love ceases to be love when it is forced," she said, sententiously, and with a curious backward movement, as though shrinking from his touch.

"Give me some task to perform whereby I may prove how dear you are to me. Ask me some difficult thing, and no matter what it cost your wish shall be gratified."

Haldée hesitated for a few minutes, her head bent; when she raised it he saw a flood of crimson had mounted from throat to brow.

"I will ask you a favour. Will you make some excuse for sending Mr. Greville from here? I—I think it would be better for us both."

It cost a desperate effort to make the request, but having done so she breathed more freely, though all the while there was a strange dull pain at her heart, for she knew the mere sense of being under the same roof as Phillip was in itself a delight, and that when he had gone life would be even more terrible than it was now.

Still, it would be, as she had said, better for him to be away, both for his own sake and the sake of her promise.

Haldée was not one of those resolute women who are capable of sustained effort, and who may always be trusted to keep their feelings under control.

She could not, like Muriel, mark out a path for herself, and follow it straight on to the end, crushing with a firm hand all obstacles that came in her way.

Under the influence of duty, and for the sake of her father, she had given up her lover; but the enormity of the sacrifice was ever present to her, and sometimes the mere sight of Phillip, the tones of his voice, the echo of his footstep, were sufficient to drown the remembrance of everything else, and the longing to cast herself on his breast, and justify herself by proving she was not deliberately false, became almost greater than she could bear. It was for this reason she wished his departure.

The Baronet did not answer for some minutes. The idea of getting rid of Greville had suggested itself many times; but there was a reason against it he could not tell her.

"I will do my best," he said, presently, a dark frown knitting his brows closely together; but I must not dismiss this art in too summarily, or I shall have people suspecting the humiliating truth of your affection for him.

He turned away as he spoke, and hastily left the room, for, however stoical a man may be, it is a very severe blow to his vanity to be reminded that the love he covets is withheld from him and lavished without measure on a rival, who, in everything save personal qualifications, is immeasurably his inferior.

The Baronet went to his study, where he seated himself in front of the writing table, and remained lost in gloomy meditations, until the entrance of a footman with the post-bag disturbed him.

Then he roused himself, and glanced carelessly over the superscriptions of the letters until a rather legal-looking one addressed to Phillip caught his eye, and he examined it closely, as if it interested him.

After a few minutes thought, he took a pen-knife and carefully removed the seal, and then, ringing for some hot water, placed the envelope over it, and was thus enabled to open it without injury to the paper.

The letter was from Pierson, and its contents ran as follows:

"MY DEAR GREVILLE,

"According to promise—although rather later than I intended—I write to give you some account of your host's youth, and I leave it to you to judge whether the few details I am enabled to offer tend to throw any light on the disappearance of your letters."

"Sir Jasper Ruthven was the son of a younger brother of Sir Edgar Ruthven, but, owing to his mother's death, and his father's second marriage, he spent the chief part of his time at Heathcliff Priors with his uncle and cousin—the latter, who was heir to the baronetcy, being a few years older than himself. When about twenty Sir Jasper came to London, and, from what I learn, plunged into all kinds of dissipation. He was reputed to be an adept at billiards, an inveterate card-player, and fond of racing and betting, and, naturally enough, he fell into pecuniary difficulties, from which, however, he seems to have been rescued by a legacy from his uncle, Sir Edgar, on whose death he returned to Heathcliff Priors, of which his cousin was now master.

"A very short time after his arrival a sad accident happened—Sir Charles Ruthven fell over the cliffs close by the house and was drowned; consequently the title and estates descended to the present baronet, whose two predecessors had died within a fortnight of each other. You may—and probably will—think this sketch a very slight one; nevertheless, it is not without significance, for it proves that Sir Jasper's reputation in his younger years was far from stainless, and points to the conclusion that he would not scruple to perform a dishonourable

action if it suited his purpose to do so. Now, I believe it was he who took your papers, and, granting this hypothesis, there remains the certainty that he must have had a motive for wishing to get them in his possession—that motive probably has to do with the secret of your birth.

"With regard to Grace Seaforth, I have had a man staying in the village of Heathcliff for the purpose of making inquiries relative to her flight; but it took place so many years ago that it is a matter of great difficulty to obtain any authentic information. It is, however, admitted by all who remember her that she was very beautiful, and much superior to her station, and it is believed that the person she eloped with was a gentleman. I also found that Sir Jasper Ruthven was supposed to have admired her very much, and on comparing dates, discovered that he left Heathcliff just before her elopement, and returned about the time of her death. Do you see to what conclusion this coincidence points—namely, that, granting Grace Seaforth to have been your mother, Sir Jasper Ruthven is the man with whom she went away, and who is therefore your father? Of course, after all, this reasoning may be false, and the whole thing turn out widely different; nevertheless, I must acknowledge very little doubt remains in my own mind as to the correctness of my surmise.

"However, I still advise you to keep silence as yet, and wait till Matthew Seaforth returns before taking any decisive step. I have had a letter from him, and, according to present arrangements, if nothing unforeseen happens, he will be in England in a fortnight's time. Directly he comes I will write to you, so that you may lose no time in meeting him. After that we shall know better how to proceed. Believe me, my dear Greville, yours very truly,

"ROBERT PIERSON."

The letter dropped from Sir Jasper's nervous hand, and fell to the floor unheeded, while he remained staring straight before him, and evidently much agitated.

"It is worse than I imagined. His suspicions have led him to action!" he muttered at last, while great drops of moisture started from his brow. "And so, after all these years, the secret will come to light! It is fate!"

His head fell forward on his chest; but a few minutes later he started up, and pouring out a glass of brandy from a spirit stand on a side table, drank it undiluted. It seemed to restore his self-possession in a degree, for his eyes grew brighter and his expression firmer. He picked up the letter and read it again, carefully weighing every syllable.

"Courage!" he said to himself; "after all, he only suspects; he cannot prove anything, and I must hit on some plan for deceiving this lawyer, in spite of his shrewdness. So Matthew Seaforth is coming back. Well, I don't think I need fear him if I can manage Philip Greville. What cursed fate ever sent him here, I wonder! I cannot comply with your request and turn him out, my fair Haldée, for that would mean starting him off to Mr. Robert Pierson, and the ensuing of complications that I am anxious to prevent. No, he must remain where he is for the present, and I must examine all letters that come to the house, and take care Pierson's next falls into my hands first. Till he writes I have nothing to fear, and when he does I shall know better what course to pursue."

He struck a wax match, and, deliberately setting fire to the barrister's communication, watched it burning till nothing remained but a blackened morsel of tinder that dropped from his fingers to the carpet.

"If inquiries are made it will be easy enough to lay the blame on the Post Office authorities," he muttered, smiling grimly, and then he sat down to ponder over a situation that he instinctively felt demanded all his powers of bold finesse to grapple with successfully.

CHAPTER XX.

Or late Lady Urwick had not been very well, and for the last two days had stayed in her own

room instead of joining the circle downstairs. There was nothing specific the matter with her, she said, when inquiries were made; she only felt weak and languid—an effect she attributed to the hot weather.

"How is Lady Urwick?" asked Philip one evening of Sybil Ruthven, who he passed in the passage outside the Viscountess's apartments. She had her hand filled with flowers—roses, heliotrope, jessamine, and carnations.

"I am just going to inquire," she answered, "and to take her my bouquet. Isn't it pretty?"

"Very!"

"I gathered the flowers myself, and see what a thorn has done for me," holding up her white hand, on which was a long, ugly scratch, with the blood trickling from it.

"Let me bind it up," said Philip. "Have you a handkerchief?"

She drew one from her pocket, and as she did so a curious cut glass phial, engraved with Eastern characters, fell from its folds on the carpet.

Greville bent to pick it up, but before restoring it to her looked at it with some interest.

"Is it not quaint?" said Sybil, putting it in her pocket rather hastily. "It was brought me from Persia filled with attar of roses, but I have not used the perfume, for it scents my handkerchiefs enough by lying in the box with them. I suppose the essence escapes through the stopper. Thank you"—as Greville tied the linen round her hand—"I must be more careful when I gather roses in future."

"Lady Urwick is fond of flowers," he observed.

"Passionately. She likes them in her bedroom, so I take them to her every evening now that she doesn't come downstairs to gather them for herself."

She opened the door as she spoke, and disappeared within, while Philip took his way to the village to spend an hour or two with the doctor, between whom and himself a sort of intimacy had sprung up, and in whose society he endeavoured to lighten the tedium and monotony of his lonely evenings.

He was undoubtedly very miserable. He would have thrown up his employment and left Heathcliff altogether if it had not been for some lingering hope that by staying he had a chance of elucidating the mystery surrounding Haldée's conduct; for the pale wretchedness of her face, whenever he caught a glimpse of her, was quite sufficient to assure him love had nothing to do with her promise to Sir Jasper, and—perhaps unconsciously to himself—he yet counted on the possibility of her return to her allegiance.

More than the time specified by Pierson had elapsed without bringing a letter from him, but the omission caused Philip no anxiety—hardly, indeed, did he think of it at all, for in the great sorrow of losing the girl he loved lesser ones were merged, and the vivid zest with which he had formerly pursued any clue likely to lead him to a knowledge of who and what his parents were had now changed into actual indifference.

The morning following his colloquy with Sybil, Lady Urwick's maid came with a message from her mistress to the effect that she wished to see him for a few minutes; and, somewhat surprised, Philip proceeded to the boudoir, where he found Muriel lying back in a lounging chair, with an Indian shawl wrapped round her, although the morning was hot enough to have been called sultry.

He started back in astonishment as he saw the change these last few days had wrought in her.

Her face was perfectly colourless, save for faint blue shadows round the mouth and eyes, and there was in her pose and manner the lassitude of one who has reached the last degree of weakness.

"What is the matter?" she asked, with a wan smile, as she gave him her hand. "Are you alarmed at my summons?"

"No, but I am at your appearance," he answered, truthfully. "Surely, Lady Urwick, you must be very ill."

"Not absolutely ill—only weak, I think."

"Ob, I dare say I shall be all right in a few days."

Philip looked doubtful.

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"Oh, no! I did not think it worth while. I am not at all desirous of making myself out an invalid when there is no necessity for it."

He did not reply, but he thought indignantly enough that it was her husband's place to have seen she had medical advice. Surely a man with any love for his wife would have done so!

"But I did not call you in to talk of myself," continued Muriel, rising to a sitting posture.

"It was of Miss Darrell I wished to speak. Don't think I am interfering on a subject which I know must be painful to you," she added, earnestly, as the young man made a half-shrinking backward movement. "If I did not take a very sincere interest in the welfare both of Haldée and yourself, I would not attempt anything of the sort; but some time ago she told me she was secretly engaged to you, and two days afterwards her formal betrothal to Sir Jasper Ruthven was announced. Since then she has pointedly avoided me, and, much as I have tried, I have never been able to get even a few minutes' conversation with her alone. Still, I have watched her, and it is easy to see she is very unhappy. I am sure she does not care for Sir Jasper, and so I thought perhaps you and she might have had some misunderstanding, and that she had accepted him in a fit of pique. If this is the case let me entreat you to go to her and make your peace before it is too late—save her, above all, from a loveless union!"

Her voice vibrated with intensity, and she leaned forward, clasping together her thin, almost transparent hands, in which the blue network of veins was distinctly visible. She ill Haldée too well not to make an effort to deliver her from the risk of such an unhappy lot as her own!

"You have not me understood me," she added, waiting for him to reply. "You believe it is my affection for Haldée that has induced me to speak!"

"I believe you are incapable of doing anything but what is good and kind," he answered, fervently, raising her hand to his lips. "I only wish is were as you supposed, so that I might have a chance of winning Haldée back. But it is not so; we have had no shadow of a quarrel; and the reason she became affianced to Sir Jasper I am as ignorant of as you yourself."

And then he told her all there was to tell of how their engagement had been broken off.

"I am assured of one thing—namely, that pressure has been brought to bear on her," said Muriel, with conviction. "She would never have acted so treacherously if left to her own free will."

"That is what I have said to myself over and over again, but it is no use for me to try and obtain a further explanation. She keeps carefully out of my way, and has taken no notice whatever of a note I contrived to get conveyed to her."

Lady Urwick thought for a few minutes before speaking again.

"I am placed in an awkward position," she observed, at length. "You see, as long as I share Sir Jasper's hospitality, it is very difficult for me to say anything in the matter, and yet I am so anxious to assure Haldée's happiness that I will make another effort to discover her real feelings, and let you know the result. Will you come in and see me again to-morrow at about this time?"

He answered in the affirmative, and was about taking leave, when a sudden spasm contracted Muriel's features, and she fell back in her chair, pressing her hands against her chest, and evidently in a paroxysm of pain. A violent fit of coughing shook her, and a slight froth rose to her lips.

Seriously alarmed, Philip rushed to a *carafe*, and poured out a glass of water, and then was about ringing the bell, but stopped as he made a motion of negation.

"It is over. I am better now," she said, presently, after drinking the water. "I am afraid I frightened you"—trying to smile.

"You have convinced me you are much more

seriously ill than you yourself believe," he responded, very gravely. "Has not Lord Urwick suggested your consulting a physician?"

"Lord Urwick!" she repeated, with a fine smile, that was half pain—half contempt. "No, he has not professed any anxiety on my account."

The admission was given involuntarily, and strive as she might she could not prevent the bitterness from making itself felt in her voice. Gland had not even been near her, for his anger and disgust at her supposed assignation with the artist had not cooled in the least; but she, not knowing this, attributed his neglect to a very different motive, more especially as she watched him every morning start for the Towers, and saw how frequently Sybil Ruthven accompanied him.

Philip dared not say more, but his heart ached with a compression that could not have been deeper had she been his own sister, for the sad lot to which she had been doomed by her father's ambition.

He left her, however, with the resolve that he himself would speak to Lord Urwick, and it happened the chance was given at once; for hardly had he closed the door of Muriel's boudoir when the Viscount, who was coming out of his own dressing-room, saw him, and stopped, waiting for him to advance.

"I was on the point of seeking you, Lord Urwick."

"Indeed!" said the Viscount, incredulously, the heavy frown not lifting from his brow.

"I have just left your wife—"

"So it seems," interrupted Claud. "May I ask what occasioned your visit to her?"

Philip looked embarrassed—in good truth he hardly knew how to answer the question, and his hesitation was not lost on the Viscount, who naturally put his own construction on it.

"I will not press for a reply that I see you are unprepared to give," he observed, sternly; "at the same time, let me impress upon you my desire that your visit should not be repeated. I do not choose for my wife to receive guests who are not my friends."

Greville flushed at the insolence of the tone, which, however, for Muriel's sake, he would not resent. He imagined it was owing to his subordinate position Lord Urwick forbade a friendship between himself and the Viscountess—that jealousy had anything to do with it never for a moment occurred to him.

"I was about telling you that Lady Urwick is really ill, and something should be done for her without delay," he said, in a voice of at least equal hauteur. "Probably you will say I have no right to interfere in such a matter."

"I do say it!" curtly, "and you must excuse my declining to listen to you."

With which remark the Viscount passed on, and entered his wife's boudoir; but if he had meditated an angry remonstrance for her indiscretion in permitting Philip's presence, all thought of it vanished when he saw her, and he was only conscious of shocked surprise at her changed appearance—even more ghastly now than when the artist had come in, for the sharp fit of pain had left her paler and more exhausted than ever.

"Why didn't you let me know you were ill?" he asked, seating himself near her.

"I did not imagine the news would be at all likely to interest you, and, besides, your time and attention have been taken up with more important matters."

"At any rate, you haven't given me a chance of proving it!" he rejoined, angrily. "I suppose you did not fear Mr. Greville being equally indifferent, otherwise you would hardly have consulted him on the subject."

She flushed a rapid glance of indignation from beneath her lowered lids.

"It would certainly never have occurred to me to make him my confidant with regard to my health."

"Why was he here then?"

"That I must decline telling you."

"As you will. But you are aware your refusal is as much an answer as anything verbal would be. I have not been blind to your peasant for this young man; but I had deter-

mined to say nothing about it to you till after we left Heathcliff, in order to avoid public scandal. Unfortunately your imprudence forces me to break my resolve, and what I have already said to him I repeat to you—I will not allow you to receive his visits on any pretext whatever."

Lady Urwick's lip curled contemptuously.

"It is very few restrictions I place upon you," continued Claud, seeing in her silence only a disinclination to allow herself to be deprived of the artist's society; "but this one I make a point of having obeyed."

"And suppose I refuse?" her spirit rising rebelliously at his masterful tone.

"Then I must remind you that whatever our private relations may be, in the eyes of the law I am your husband, and, as such, have a right to exert some authority over you."

She turned away her head without replying, and in this position her profile was towards him, and he could see the curious sharpness with which the features were defined, and the dark hollows in the cheek.

In spite of all, a strange yearning rose in his heart to take the slight figure in his arms, and tell her how dear she had grown to him.

He mastered the inclination with an impatient sigh, but his voice was very gentle as he said,—

"Although I feel it was necessary, I am afraid I have had to speak harshly to you, Muriel. Your appearance certainly should inspire the reverse of severity. You were wrong in not letting me know your indisposition was so serious."

"It is not serious," she panted, morbidly anxious to avoid the charge of attempting to provoke sympathy. "As a rule I suffer no pain, and I shall be quite well in a few days."

Lord Urwick shook his head.

"I am driving to the Towers this morning, and on my way I will call in the village, and send Clifford to see you, and then we shall hear what he has to say."

"Is Miss Ruthven going with you?" asked Muriel, abruptly.

"Yes," he responded, in slight embarrassment. "There was some question about the decoration of your rooms, and she said she thought she knew your taste well enough to decide it."

He did not add that it had been at Sybil's own suggestion he had arranged to take her, or that if his own wishes were consulted he would rather go alone.

"Pray do not let me detain you!" exclaimed Muriel, taking up a volume and beginning to read; and thus summarily dismissed, the Viscount left the room, while after his departure the book dropped from his wife's listless fingers, and great tears of wounded love, pride, and bitterest mortification made their way slowly down her pallid cheeks.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1833. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

KESTREL'S FOLLY.

—10—

(Continued from page 297.)

"Adèle is not here. I cannot leave the stall."

"I will go and look for her, then you will be at liberty," and to Adèle's intense relief he turned away, walking slowly down the whole length of the brightly-decked room, that was such a pretty sight, with its gay banners, and streamers, and lightly-clad throng, moving to and fro, chatting, laughing, buying, bargaining, flirting, enjoying themselves in various ways.

The grey eyes followed the tall, erect figure wistfully. She was beginning now to plumb the depth of the wretchedness of her position—to understand what bitterness fate held in store for her.

She had loved Conrad Huskisson with that ardour and passion that very young men and women feel. The affection she had for Tracy

Pierpoint, her cousin, the playmate of her childhood's days, was of a totally different order.

It was deep, sincere, lasting, and had grown with her growth, though she had not known it, and at last developed into this fatal feeling which bid fair to wreck her life utterly and entirely.

She felt that his love was the only thing that would satisfy the terrible heart-hunger she felt. It was proof against all change, independent of eye fancies. He loved her for herself.

She would never feel a tinge of doubt or mistrust of him. This man would give her a life-long loyalty, and unalterable devotion, and before her unfolded a picture of the happiness that would be hers as his wife, and then with a sigh she put it from her, and resolved to tell him deliberately, or let him know by some means, that he must go—pass out of her life for ever.

"We have raffled the chair-cover, Adèle, and Bulwer has taken the six antimacassars himself," broke in Hélène's voice, dispersing her musings quickly.

"I am glad to hear it!" she said, quietly.

"Nearly everything has gone now."

"Let me take what remains!" suggested young Linklater.

"You are very kind."

"Here is a five-pound note. May I consider these things mine?"

"They are most liberal," she said, gratefully.

"They are not worth so much."

"They are worth more to me," he said, joyfully. "Hélène has worked some of them, Adèle, sister," he added, in a whisper, "congratulate me. She has at last consented to become my wife!"

"I do congratulate you," she responded, cordially, a glad light illuminating her sweet, pale face. "May you have all the happiness you deserve."

"Thanks, thanks!"

"Adèle, have you forgiven me!" whispered her sister, extreately.

"Oh, yes, yes, child!" returned Mrs. Huskisson, giving her arm a loving squeeze. "Do not speak of it. I am so very, very glad of the news Bulwer has told me."

"You are satisfied!" asked the mutinous, impulsive, but good-hearted girl.

"Quite. I am sure you will have a good and devoted husband!"

"What is all this about husbands?" asked the Colonel's voice.

"Am I to tell?" queried Adèle, with an arch look at the newly-betrothed pair.

"Oh, yes!" they both chorused.

And then the news was told, and they were again congratulated, and then Tracy took his cousin out to the grounds—where tea was being dispensed by Mrs. Hepzibah Linklater and other ladies—and procured her a seat under a shady tree and a cup of that fluid that cheers, &c., and they sat there a little apart from that gay, happy throng, listening to the sweet music discoursed by the band until it was time to depart.

"We must let the young lovers go by themselves!" remarked the Colonel, with a laugh. "You will come with me in the dog-cart, Adèle?"

For a moment she hesitated, and then assenting, she was soon seated beside him, as they bowled along the moonlit lanes, sweet with the perfume of honeysuckle and summer wild blooms.

"I have something for you," he said after a while, breaking the silence.

"For me?" she echoed, in surprise.

"Yes. I mean something from the bazaar."

"Here it is!" holding up a magnificent bouquet of Maréchal Niel roses.

"How lovely!" burying her face in the cool, fragrant flowers.

"Will you accept it?"

"No, Cousin Tracy, I will not!" she said firmly, putting aside with her hand the flowers he offered.

"No!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Why not?"

"Because I must accept nothing from you!"

"Adèle!" he urged, in hurt surprise.

"Don't be vexed," she said, softly.

"But I am vexed," he rejoined. "I know

you like roses, and I thought these would please you!"

"They do please me," she answered, in low tones. "Only—oh, Tracy, don't you see—don't you understand!" she moaned, clasping her hands, and lifting her tear-filled, wistful eyes to his.

"My dearest, have I vexed you?" he murmured. "Forgive me. I did not know—I did not mean to!"

"There is nothing to forgive, only I must not take them from you!" and then her firmness gave way, and covering her face with her trembling hands she gave vent to the sobs that were convulsing her slender frame.

In an instant the reins were dropped, and Pierpoint's arm was round her waist. He forgot everything at the sight of her tears.

"Adèle, my darling, what have I done? What a brute I am! Don't cry; your tears are agony to me!"

She did not answer, only sat there shaking and trembling, while he strained her to him, and the horse—fortunately a quiet one—ambled steadily on, knowing he was going to his stable.

"Don't cry!" he implored. "I will do anything you wish. Only forgive me. I never dreamt of this. I thought I might suffer, and was content to do so. But you! Oh, my darling! my darling! Unintentionally, how irreparably I have wronged you!"

"Not irreparably," she murmured, gently. "Not that yet. We can still look fearlessly in each other's eyes."

"True, Adèle, and no act of mine shall alter that. To-morrow I will leave the Folly and never see you again, though without you my life is simply worthless!"

There was no mistaking the pain and passion in his voice. She believed him.

"Thank you. I am so sorry to drive you away," she said, pitifully, looking at him with lovely, tear-drenched eyes.

"I should never have come. Looking back now, I see that I have loved you all your life!"

"Poor Tracy!" and she put one little hand on his consolingly, and the light touch made him thrill from head to foot.

"Don't thank me, child!" he said, speaking lightly with tremendous effort. "And now will you take my roses? They are the last thing I shall ever offer you."

"Yes," she answered, simply, "and I shall always keep them" and as she took them he picked up the ribbons and urged the horse on to its utmost speed, reaching the Folly in a few moments.

Next morning, as he sat in Mr. Dalziel's study, waiting to tell him that he was going, the butler brought in his letters and papers. Idly he turned them over, and read some of them listlessly, and then opening a paper his eye caught a paragraph, and in a moment his whole aspect changed, and he read it eagerly, exclaiming "Free!" as he finished it.

It was an account of a duel that had taken place on the sands at Calais between an Englishman and a Frenchman, whose wife the former had made love to, and the wronged man had run his betrayer through the heart, and the dead man's name was—Conrad Huskisson!

A year later, when summer was at its height, and the gardens around the Folly bloomed bright with beautiful flowers, Tracy Pierpoint appeared there once more, and after a brief interview with Dama and Mr. Dalziel was told by them that Adèle was in the drawing-room, and that he might go to her.

He wanted no second bidding. With quickly beating heart and throbbing pulses he opened the door, and closed it softly behind him.

Adèle sat by the open window, in a thin, white gown, her eyes somewhat sad and wistful, bent on the distant glimpse of dancing, sunlit sea, her head slightly drooped, an air of dejection over her lovely face. His heart flew to her in a wave of tenderness, and in a moment he was at her side.

"Adèle."

She lifted her head. One glance from soul to soul, and then she was in his arms, clasped to his

heart, and he was taking those kisses for which he had hungered and waited so long.

"It seems like a dream to have you at last!" he whispered. "To be able to call you really mine!"

"May we never wake from it," she answered, twining her arms round him, and resting her head on his breast—at rest, contented at last!

[THE END.]

OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

—10:—

CHAPTER VIII.

"WELL, have you anything to tell me?" inquired Maud the next morning, as she and Maggie strolled through the rose-garden, where Gisèle de Dijons, Aimée Véberts and Lord Raglan nodded and swayed in the gentle breeze, alongside the pale, dewy tea-roses and other choice specimens of the "queen of flowers." "You were so fast asleep last night, or rather this morning, when I went up to our room, that it was impossible to wake you, though I tried hard enough, for I wanted to hear the news."

"Did you?" said Maggie, blushing guiltily; for after fleeing from the picture-gallery she had gone up to her bedroom, and, tossing off her costly trappings, had crept into bed as quickly as possible, not caring, after the stormy scene through which she had just passed, to encounter her sister, and be cross-questioned by her. So she had fledged to be asleep, and had answered not one of the questions put to her.

"Of course I did—and do for the matter of that. I saw you leave the ball-room with Sir Lionel some time before the programme finished. Where did you go?"

"To the picture gallery."

"Oh, indeed! A nice retired spot for lovers. Well, did he propose again?"

"Yes."

"And, then, I am to congratulate you!"

"No-o," faltered her sister.

"No! You don't mean to say that you have been foolish enough—wicked enough to refuse him again!"

"No."

"Then what have you done, in the name of goodness?"

"Asked for time—time to think about it?" replied the young girl, with downcast eyes.

"How much time," demanded Maud with a thrill of triumph, for she knew that temporizing meant surrender.

"A week."

"And you will give him an answer then?"

"Of course, I must."

"I hope it will be a sensible one, and that you will let no foolish scruples stand in the way of your advancement."

"Maud, don't!" implored her sister, twisting her slender fingers together until the nails bruised the soft white flesh. "You torture me. Have you no feeling—no pity? Think how I shall despise myself if I am false to one—nay, false to both."

"I don't see why you should despise yourself. You love Lionel. You mistook mere liking—mere friendship—for a warmer feeling with regard to Terence, and surely that is no reason for making yourself and the man you love miserable for ever. You should—"

"Don't—don't!" cried Maggie, again, "don't speak of it. Give me this week to think over it quietly. Leave me in peace, or I shall go mad!"

"Of course I won't speak of it if you don't wish it," replied Maud, soothingly, started by the wild, hunted look of pain in the violet eyes, fearing she might go too far, and do more harm than good. "Let us change the subject. Doesn't the park look lovely to-day?"

"Yes."

"How charmingly situated the Dower House is, there in the heart of the woods. The Dowager Ladies Molyneux have nothing much

to complain of when they are obliged to leave the Hall. I wish Eunice would take us over it. Such a quaint old place must be well worth inspecting, and I believe there are treasures of 'curios' there, gathered from time to time by different dowagers and members of the Molyneux family."

"Yes," assented the other again, hardly listening.

"I think if the Hall were mine that I should spend part of my time at the Dower House. It must be more cosy in winter."

"Perhaps so. Yet no one who had a right to live at the Hall would ever care to leave it, I think," and Maggie's eyes dwelt fondly on the grand house, with its oriel windows, peaked gables, and old-world aspect.

She loved it, this ancestral home of an ancient race. It was dearer to her than any other spot in the whole world. She had played in its vast rooms and dim corridors as a child, had wandered in the woods and parks that surrounded it as a girl, and something deep down in her heart told her she would probably live in it as a wife and a mother.

"Not for long," agreed Maud. "There is little or nothing wanting to make it an ideal place of abode. It has only one drawback to my eyes."

"And what is that?"

"After being here our own place seems so wretched and poverty-stricken I quite dread to go back to it."

"Well, you have three days more to be happy in them, as we don't go back until Monday."

"True. Yet the contrast will seem all the greater when we do return. I almost envy Kate as she goes back to-day."

"Not really, Maud!" queried Maggie, looking at her anxiously, for she felt the time had come when she might say a word for the love-struck Hussar."

"Why not?"

"Because I should have thought it would be pleasant to you to stay in any house where Clifford Clinton was."

"Would you, really?"

"Yes, really. You care for him, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I do," carelessly responded her sister.

"And will you be his wife when he asks you?"

"Well, really, my dear, I think it will be quite time enough to make up my mind when he does ask me."

"You know that he will do so some day."

"He may not. Perhaps he is only amusing himself with little flirtation."

"Maud, how can you say such a thing! You know he worships the ground you tread on, and you know also that you check him whenever he tries to propose. He would have done so long ago but for your coldness, and fear of being refused. How can you do it?" went on the young girl, warmly. "How can you throw away and value so lightly the treasure of his love! He is such a good, honest fellow, it is cruel to treat him as you do."

"Is it?" demanded the elder Miss Randal, coolly.

"You know it is. You ought to be kinder to him. I wish you would promise me to marry him when he asks you; there is nothing to hinder you from saying yes—nothing stands between you and your happiness," she added, with a sigh.

"How do you know, little Solomon! I may have a skeleton in the cupboard, and I couldn't make any promises, for I might break them, and that would be a dreadful thing to do. And there is the pony-phæton going up to the house, so we had better make haste or we shall not be in time to say good-bye to Kate before she goes. We must postpone our interesting conversation indefinitely;" and without another word she walked off across the rose-garden, and joined the group on the terrace, who had come out to see Miss Randal off, leaving Maggie, who followed slowly, quite in the dark as to whether she had done any good or not.

"Just in time, girls, for a fond farewell," said

Eunice as they approached, pulling on her driving gauntlets. "We are going off."

"Good-bye, my dears," said Kate, kissing them in her usual motherly fashion. "I shall expect you on Monday."

"Yes," they both answered together.

"That is to say, if we let them go then," observed the Baronet, with a tender glance at the whilom Ice Queen's pale face.

He wasn't at all anxious for them to go. He wished them to stay till the following Thursday, the day on which Maggie's week of grace expired—the day on which she was pledged to give him her answer; and he felt he would be surer of her if she was under the same roof with himself, though he hadn't much fear.

She loved him—he had heard it from her own sweet lips—and he felt that she would not, could not, say "no" to him again. It is so hard for a woman to refuse the man she loves anything, let honour strive as it will.

A great passion—a great love—is the strongest thing in the whole world. It breaks down barriers, levels inequality of birth, sweeps away pride, triumphs over want of money, flings creeds and faiths and plighted troth to the four winds, and gains its own end, despite obstacles and resistance—conquers everything, and ends only—is vanquished only—by the relentless power of Death.

"Yes," chimed in Eunice, "don't expect them till you see them."

"Very well, I won't," agreed Miss Randal.

"That is right. I am only sorry that you are obliged to go home," said the Baronet, cordially.

"Thanks. I am sorry; but as Laura is still staying with the Travers, I don't like to leave my father long alone."

"You are a dutiful daughter," whispered Thoroton, who, with the Comte, intended to ride after the phaeton, and escort the ladies safely to their destination, though the Parsonage was little more than a mile from the Hall. "Why didn't you send one of your younger sisters?"

"Oh! they enjoy gaiety so much, it would be a pity to deprive them of it."

"And don't you?"

"Yes," answered Kate, with her sweet, calm smile; but I am older, more sober. And then I am housekeeper, my presence is more necessary at home than theirs."

"I see," said the Squire, looking rather disappointed, for he began to reflect that Mr. Randal might be the reverse of anxious to part with a daughter who was evidently his right hand, his housekeeper and amanuensis, and a sweet womanly creature to boot. I hope you will let me call: I should like to know your father."

"Certainly. We shall be very pleased to see you."

"Thanks!"

And then the gentlemen mounted their horses, and Kate seated herself in the phaeton; and Eunice, touching the cream-coloured ponies with her dainty whip, they sprang off at a great pace, and were soon lost to sight under the shade of the branching lime trees that flanked the avenue.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOWER HOUSE.

"WHAT shall we do to amuse ourselves today?" asked the Baronet, after watching them disappear in the distance.

"Anything you like, I," answered Clinton; "so long as we shall not be called upon to display much energy."

"What, are you run down after one night's dancing?"

"Yes, very much so, and inclined only for the *danses far nient*."

"Lazy fellow."

"Don't call me that; it isn't fair. Just think of what I went through last night."

"In what way?"

"The way of wearing wigs and overgrown hats. My head will never feel cool again," and

the captain lifted his straw hat, and let the summer wind play with the fair curls that clustered thickly on his brow.

"Shouldn't have chosen such a dress. It was vanity made you do it. You thought it would look becoming," said Lionel, jestingly.

"And so it was," replied his friend, coolly. "I looked like Adonis and Narcissus rolled into one. I appeal to you, Miss Maggie. Didn't I look fascinating?"

"Very fascinating."

"I won't ask you," he went on in a low tone, turning to Maud; "because I know, only too well, that you never have a good word to say of, or for me."

"You are not quite just," she responded quickly, in an equally low voice, giving him a bright glance from her blue eyes, for there was a considerable amount of bitterness in his manner, and she had no wish to drive away her wealthy wooer; "and, at any rate, I have never said anything disparaging."

"True. But I want more than that."

"And perhaps you will get it some day," she rejoined, with a little rippling laugh.

"When? Tell me when I may hope," he began eagerly.

"No, no, you must wait patiently," she answered, and then turning to the others, asked quickly, "Well, have you decided what you will do?"

"Yes," announced the Baronet. "We are going on the river. Do you care to come also?"

"I should like it above all things," she answered at once, knowing that it would do no good to let her sister go alone with Sir Lionel, as mattocks were in abeyance between them for the space of a week, and not wishing to be left alone with Clinton, who looked very much as though he would like to say something desperately tender, after her little encouraging speech.

"And you, Clifford?"

"I shall be charmed. That is to say, if you don't expect me to do too much hard work."

"No, I promise you that. We will paddle up a little way and then picnic on the banks. Merton," he added, to a gorgeous creature with flesh-coloured legs and a powdered head, who happened to be within hall, "will you see that a lunch-basket is taken down to the boathouse at once?"

"Yes, sir," responded the man, disappearing to give the order.

"We may as well stroll slowly down and get ourselves aboard."

And away they went through the gardens and park to the river; and getting into the dainty skiff they went up against stream, Sir Lionel paddling steadily and easily.

"What place is that?" asked the Captain as he lastly steered, seated on the softly-cushioned seats between his fair companions, looking at the clustered chimneys of an old house amid the trees, bathed in sunshine.

"The Dower House."

"Quaser-looking place."

"Yes, isn't it?" chimed in Maud. "I should so like to go over it, and pry into all its old nooks and corners."

"That wish can be easily gratified. We will land and go over it, if old Dame Twerton will let us in."

"I doubt whether she will," remarked Maud laughingly; "for whilst you were away we tried more than once to gain admittance, and were sternly refused, with a rough 'Gang aw, I want nane bodies spearin' about the place,' followed up by the door being shut in our faces."

"That is just her way," agreed the Baronet, with an amused smile on his handsome face. "She is an honest creature, but surly and gruff to the last degree. Perhaps, though, as the place is mine, she will let me in."

"Does she live there alone?" inquired Maggie, as they went down a deep hollow lane, where the dog-roses climbed in wild confusion, and the woodbine trailed, and the blue convolvulus reared its delicate head amid the untrimmed hedgerows.

"No, she has her son there part of the time, and his child, so she is not quite isolated. But I am sure she would not have the smallest objection to live there by herself. She has been in our service over sixty years, and all that time she has spent there, for she married my grandfather's valet, Inerton, a native of Wingfield, and he was a great favourite with Sir Robert, who for some unaccountable reason preferred living at the Dower House to the Hall, and spent the last years of his life and died there."

"That was strange," said the young girl, reflectively.

"Yes, I could never understand his preference for such an antique place."

And the Baronet looked as though he couldn't, but on Maud's face was a queer expression of knowledge mingled with a look of fear, for she was beginning to guess the truth; and she said hastily, with great animation,

"I can. There is an old-world charm over the whole place, which is very fascinating to some natures. This garden is delightful."

And it was truly a sweet, quaint spot. There were old-fashioned plants in great profusion: clove gilly-flowers, yellow lupins, purple bell-shaped foxgloves, scarlet pimpernel, white eyes, damask roses, and an herb-bed, containing sweet-scented marjoram and all manner of antediluvian simples. A running brook made tender melody as it sang merrily along by the trimly-clipped hedges; oriental poppies flaunted their gay blooms in the borders, rooks owned in the tall tree-tops, and over all the older oaks and elms threw the shadow of their thickly-leaved branches, through which the sunlight fell in chequered patches on the velvety turf.

"Yes, I suppose it is. At any rate those gentlemen seem to approve of it," and he pointed at an elderly cock, accompanied by a bevy of ancient hens, who were strutting about, scratching up the earth and clucking vigorously, and at a venerable, grey-muzzled dog, who lay basking in the warm sun-rays, blinking and winking, seemingly too old to get up and bay at them.

"She will hear that if she is not stone-dead," he went on with a laugh, giving the bell a terrific pull.

"And if she is, too," remarked Clinton, "that peal was enough to wake the dead."

And he was right; for in a minute or two the massive door, barred and studded with iron, was opened to the length of a guarding chain, and the figure of a woman appeared in the aperture—a woman well-stricken in years, with a wrinkled, yellow skin, a nose like a hawk's beak, and deeply-sunken eyes that glared with a wild, uncanny expression from the over-hanging, bushy brows.

Her face was framed in a cap-frill so huge that it looked more like an Elizabethan ruff than anything else; her shrivelled, scraggy arms were bare to the elbow, and over her shoulders, loosely girt about the waist, was a riding pelisse, such as was worn by women of quality in the days of "bonnie Prince Charlie," with a triple cape, and ample skirts, which gave a grotesque appearance to the bent, withered form.

"Who's ringin'?" she demanded, in a harsh, grating voice.

"I, Dame Twerton," responded the Baronet, stepping forward.

"Who's you?" she queried, peering at him keenly.

"I am Lionel Molyneux," he answered, with one of his sunny smiles.

"Lionel Molyneux! Heavens perairve us! Thee young master," she burst out in startled tones. "Who's wantin' that ye come here? It's too early yet."

"I want to show these ladies over the house."

"Na, na," she cried quickly; "dinner enter this house. Gang back, laddle, gang back. The time has na come for thee to cross the thrassell o' Molyneux's Rest."

"I think it has, dame," he said, pleasantly, though firmly.

"Na, na, dinna say that—dinner say that. Ye no ken wha's meant."

"Well, whether I do or not, it comes to the same thing, for I am coming in. So be good enough to unchain the door."

A moment the old crone gazed at him doubtfully; then seeing he meant what he said, she slipped off the chain and threw wide the heavy door, muttering and mumbling to herself the

while, in an uncanny fashion, much to the amusement of Clinton and Maggie—an amusement, however, that was not shared by Maud, whose fears and misgivings were increasing rapidly, and who wished heartily that they had not come to the Dower House, better known to the peasants and people around by the significant name of Molyneux's Rest.

"We'll not trouble you, dame," observed its master, as they crossed the dim, marble flagged hall. "Though I have never been here before, I have no doubt that I shall be able to play the part of showman satisfactorily; so we need not keep you from your domestic duties."

"Na, na," answered the old woman, wagging her head backwards and forwards. "I'll no gang, I'll stay. Ye might see wha' your mither dinna wish ye to."

"Well, just as you like," he said, good-humouredly, rather at a loss to account for her persistency. "We'll go in here first," and he pushed open door and entered a long, low room, panelled shoulder-high with time-blackened oak, and painted above in dark green, with heavily-beamed ceiling, and narrow casement windows; not a pleasant apartment by any means, with its stiff suite of Chippendale furniture, upholstered in black haircloth, and one or two grim portraits, frowning down from the dark walls.

"Nothing much to be seen here," observed Clinton, looking round.

"No. It resembles a prison. Let us see what is on the other side of the hall."

Crossing over, they all entered another room, evidently meant for a drawing-room, for, though panelled in the same way, the walls above were painted with exquisite copies of Watteau's masterpieces, "The Ladies of the Old Régime," "Life of the Gay Cavalier," "The Fête Champêtre," and others. The couches and chairs were covered with costly ambassan tapestry; spindle-legged tables were dotted about, strewn with china and knick-knacks; in one corner stood a spinet, in another a harp-chord, and side by side with the Watteau copies hung quaint mirrors and rare miniatures.

"Better than the other."

"Yes. Still I don't think very much of it. Perhaps we shall find something up above," said Sir Lionel, slowly mounting the noble staircase, which was of the same time-blackened wood as wainscoted the rooms.

"Ah! this is more to my liking!" he exclaimed, throwing back a door at the top of the stairs, and showing a vast room, with elaborately carved wainscoting and a polished floor, over which were laid tiger skins from India, wolf skins from Russia, lion skins from Africa, trophies of the chase, won by bygone Molyneuxes. Deers' antlers, mooses' horns, foxes' heads and brushes, elephants' tusks, dried snakes, hung on the walls, intermingled with guns, pistols, spears and weapons of all sorts, that gleamed brightly in the ruddy sun-glow; hunting crops, richly mounted riding-whip, spurs, stirrups, bits, both ancient and modern, quaint walking-sticks, stuffed birds, beasts and fishes, including a hideous crocodile, suspended, like Mahomet's effigy, 'twixt heaven and earth, and an owl, with a prodigious white face, and heaps of other curiosities, which are so dear to the hearts of some men.

"Yes, this is famous," agreed his friend. "I wonder why you don't carry these treasures up to the hall!"

"Well, you see this place is really more my mother's than mine. The dowagers come here when the eldest sons marry, and bring their brides to the ancestral halls"—the young man glanced at Maggie as he spoke, and a conscious blush rose to her fair cheek—"so I shouldn't like to touch anything. Besides, to tell the truth, I didn't know I was possessor of all these fine things. As a child I was never let come near the place; then I went to school, and the last ten years, as you know, I have spent abroad. This is the first time I have ever been here—"

"It will na be last," croaked the old crone, breaking in.

"No, I hope not, dame," he answered, pleasantly. "I like it rather, and have no doubt it

will improve on acquaintance," and then the two girls sat on the great, broad seat below the window-sills, and the young men went round inspecting the weapons, handling the swords, criticising the pistols, and old Nance Twerton stood in the doorway, a queer figure in her antique pelisse, watching them and muttering, and wagging her head.

"Well, we've inspected those pretty closely, now which way shall we go?" asked Sir Lionel, looking down the long corridor, which ran to the right and left.

"Ye canna gang this way," announced the dame, planting herself firmly in the middle of the passage at his right.

"Why not?"

"Ye canna gang this way, far's leads to my room. Ye mun gang the other route, if ye want to see the gran' chambers."

"Oh! very well," he answered at once, going to a great room with a huge four-post bed, decked with eable plumes, that made it look like a hearse. "A pretty view from here," he said to Maggie, who was at his side, looking out of the window.

"Yes, very pretty. But I wonder why this window is barred so strongly! What an odd idea!"

"Yes, isn't it? It puts me in mind of a mad-house."

"Mad—mad-house!" cried Dame Twerton, with sudden ferocity. "Wha's speakin' of a mad-house!"

"I was," acknowledged the Baronet, looking at her with considerable surprise. "The barred window put me in mind of it."

"'Twas for the bairns—to keep them fra fallin' oot," explained the old woman, eagerly.

"Oh! I see," said her master, satisfied with the explanation, and going on to another chamber.

But Maud—keen-sighted, far-seeing Maud—was not satisfied with what she considered was a very lame explanation, for she knew that nursery windows were never barred right up to the top; and watching her opportunity, when Nance was occupied following closely at her master's heels, she slipped out of the room, and sped swiftly down the corridor to the end which Nance said was occupied by her room. A green baize door faced her.

She pushed hard, it swung heavily and slowly back, showing a short, dark passage with an iron-clamped massive door at the other end. She went on; the door resisted the pressure of her hands. She felt about till her fingers closed on a key; with a mighty effort she turned it in the lock, the door opened inwards and disclosed a padded room, with barred windows, and all the paraphernalia required for raving lunatics.

One glance was enough to show her her suspicions were correct, and that the Dower House was the abode to which the Molyneuxes were sent when they became afflicted with the dreadful malady which was the curse of their family, and which had gained the place the title of Molyneux's Rest; and hastily locking the door she retraced her steps, eager to get Sir Lionel out of the house before he should guess the terrible secret that had been so carefully guarded from him.

"Haven't you seen enough yet?" she asked, in a voice that trembled somewhat, despite her efforts to steady it.

"Yes, I think we have very nearly. Are you tired? You look pale."

"I am rather," she answered, glad of any excuse that would get him away, "and it feels so cold and damp here."

"Doesn't it?" agreed Maggie, with a shiver that did not escape her lover's observant eye. "I feel quite chilled."

"Do you?" he said, anxiously. "Then we must leave at once. You will soon get warm again in the sunshine," and giving a crown to Nance, he offered her his arm, and descended the staircase, followed closely by Maud and Clinton.

They lingered a little in the quaint garden talking to the old woman's grandchild, a pretty, dusky-faced little girl, who was playing with a

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clear-eyed kister, and this delay caused one of the party no small amount of uneasiness; but glancing up, Maud was relieved to find that the barred windows were all at the other side of the house, and that there was nothing to excite suspicion in Sir Lionel's mind if he did study the front of his antique mansion.

However, she was sincerely glad when they were once more in the skiff discussing the dainty luncheon the housekeeper had provided for them, and far from sorry when they were once more gliding down the river on their homeward way.

Maggie also felt relieved on leaving the place. Something had weighed on her spirits, an intangible fear, a nameless horror, for which she was quite unable to account, and which depressed her.

She soon recovered her spirits in the boat. It was so delightful on the river. The birds sang, the sun shone, the drooping trees shadowed the rippling water, the rushes and sedges rustled in the gentle breeze as the dainty craft swept along, leaving a shining track behind her on the sun-kissed stream.

The sky was of a rich intense blue overhead, with here and there fine white clouds standing up like "winter icebergs on a summer sea," and in the distance were heavy purple ones tinged with gold. Nature wore too fair a garb, too winsome an aspect not to drive away all fear and care from a young mind.

"Truants, where have you been?" asked Lady Molyneux, who was sitting in the rose-garden with Eugenie and the Comte when they returned.

"We have been to the Dower House," replied her son, "inspecting all the fine things there."

"Where?" gasped her ladyship, with paling face.

"To the Dower House," he repeated, "Molyneux's Rest. You know I never—"

But he did not finish his speech, for without a word his mother slid off her chair and fell fainting at his feet.

In a minute he had her in his strong young arms, and bore her off to the house; but it was some time before she regained consciousness, and when she did she looked so scared and wild that the family doctor, Mr. Bainbridge, who had been sent for from Wingfield, ordered perfect rest and quiet, and said she must not leave her room.

This order she obeyed partly, for, after a rather lengthy consultation with him, after he left, her maid came to Maud to say that her ladyship wished to see her for a few moments.

Maud was dressing for dinner, and when she had put the finishing touches to her toilet she went to her hostess's room.

"My dear," said Lady Molyneux, smiling faintly as she came in, "I am sorry to trouble you just now, but—but will you tell me exactly what occurred at the Dower House to-day?"

Thus adjured, Maud detailed exactly what had happened, with the exception of her own discovery of the padded room.

"Then, Li didn't see anything that he didn't like there?" queried his mother, with another wan smile at the conclusion of the recital.

"Nothing whatever. He only saw what he did like—weapons, and skins, and antlers, and all those sort of things that he is fond of."

"Thank Heaven for that!" murmured Lady Molyneux, looking relieved. "It is rather a gruesome place, I think," she went on apologetically, "apt to make one feel dull and depressed."

"I think it a delightful old place—so beautifully situated," returned her guest, determined not to show her knowledge.

"Yes, very prettily situated; but the house itself is so ancient and dull that it would make an undesirable dwelling-place. There, I mustn't keep you any longer," she added, as the sound of the gong rang out, calling the loafers to dinner. "Don't mention our conversation to anyone."

"Certainly not, dear Lady Molyneux, if you don't wish it. I hope you will be better to-morrow."

"Thanks," replied the elder lady, returning her kiss, "I hope I shall;" and then Maud, not sorry to be released, ran swiftly downstairs, and joined the young people in the dining-room,

and sat beside the gallant hussar, and blushed and laughed at his soft speeches and tender nothings in a way that encouraged him, and therefore made him feel very happy, and very hopeful.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1885. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

In Italy the day is counted from sunset to sunset, and from 1 o'clock to 24.

"My husband," said Mrs. Malaprop, "is just crazy over the opening of the fishing season. He can't think or talk of anything else." "Fond of the sport, is he?" asked her friend. "Well, I should say so! He's a regular Anglo-maniac."

It was the shank of the evening in Berlin.

"Good evening, Herr Police Officer," said the Citizen. "Come with me," was the policeman's answer. "Donner wetter! Was ist los?" asked the astonished citizen. "You, that it is evening assumed have, when the emperor not dined has yet already."

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July 8, 1899.

SOCIETY.

THE German Emperor costs his country £1,000,000 a year.

THE Prince of Wales is to be a guest at Compton Place, Eastbourne, from Saturday, July 15th, until Monday, the 17th. His Royal Highness will visit the show of the Sussex Agricultural Society at Eastbourne before he returns to London.

THE most expensive material ever produced for a dress was that purchased by the Empress of Germany last year from Lyons. The material was white silk brocade, having flowers, birds, and foliage in relief, and cost £25 a yard, the actual value of the raw material, it is said, being £20.

PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA will visit the Empress Frederick at Friedrichshof, near Cronberg, and Prince and Princess Louis of Battenberg at Helligenberg, near Jagenheim (where she is to meet Princess Beatrice), before returning to Kiel, and about the end of July she goes to Hemmelmark, Prince Henry's picturesque domain in Holstein, for two months.

THE Queen is hugely delighted with the little daughter of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse. The Grand Duchess Elizabeth is not yet five years old, and bears an extraordinary likeness to her mother. For her age she is a very clever child, and has charming manners, which have much pleased her Royal great-grandmother.

IT is satisfactory to know that Prince Arthur of Connaught will not have to leave Eton after all this term. It is now contemplated to let him remain at the famous old College for another eighteen months or so, but at the end of that period, instead of going to one or other of the Universities, it will be necessary to send him to Germany to complete his education in the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, to which he is the heir-presumptive.

THE Tsar has ever since his boyhood been an enthusiastic cyclist, but now his Majesty has developed a taste for the automobile, to the great delight of his French friends, and has had specially made for him in Paris a magnificent petroleum tricycle of burnished steel. The machine is entirely devoid of ornaments, except a small silver escutcheon fixed on the left steering bar, bearing the Imperial arms. A little wicker-work car has been constructed in St. Petersburg which may be attached to the machine for the occupancy of the Tsaritsa or her children.

THE Royal yacht *Osborne*, which returned to Portsmouth recently, after an absence in the Mediterranean of more than three months, is berthed in the Harbour, near to the north railway jetty, and she is to undergo an overhaul and refit. The crew have been turned over to the *Belvedere* hulk. Orders have been received that only urgent repairs are to be taken in hand at present, as the *Osborne* is to have a thorough overhaul next winter. The *Osborne* is to be joined at Portsmouth by the Prince of Wales on Friday, July 28th, and when H.R.H. leaves Cowes the yacht will probably carry the Duke of York to Denmark and Norway. It is expected that the *Osborne* will be in Copenhagen Roads during most of the autumn.

THERE are still three rulers older than the Queen, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg heading the list, being eighty-two next month, King Christian coming second with eighty-one last April, and the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar third, as he will be eighty-one on the 24th inst. But older by far than either are some of the Royal Princesses of Europe. The Duchess Frederica of Anhalt-Bernburg will be eighty-eight on October 9th. She is the oldest Royal personage in Europe, and aunt of King Christian of Denmark. Next in age, two years younger, comes the Princess Josephine of Baden, widow of Prince Charles Antoine of Hohenzollern; whilst third on the list is the Princess Clementine of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, who was eighty-two on June 3rd. A fourth Princess running them close is the Duchess Alexandrine of the same house, who is seventy-nine this year.

STATISTICS.

A TEASPOONFUL of microbes contain over 4,000,000.

THE rainfall of Plymouth is nearly double that of London.

ABOUT 33 per cent. of the cigars sold in London are not made of tobacco.

FIVE per cent. more executions take place in England than in France.

ON an average no fewer than two hundred people are killed by lightning every year.

GEMS.

DISCRETION is not cowardice, neither is blatant volatility courage.

GENEROSITY, to deserve the name, comprises the desire and the effort to benefit others, without reference to self.

MANY calumnies are injurious even after being refuted. Like the Spanish flies, they sting when alive and blister when dead.

To speak well supposes a habit of attention which shows itself in the thought: by language we learn to think, and, above all, to develop thought.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BROILED VENISON.—It is best broiled over charcoal. When the broiler is hot grease the bars with olive oil; place your steak on them and sear it quickly, first on one side and then on the other, turning it frequently; it should be rare. When done, put it on a hot dish, season it with butter, salt and pepper, and set in the oven a few moments. Serve very hot.

STEWED IRISH POTATOES.—Wash, peel and slice six potatoes; throw them in cold water for ten minutes. Then place them in a stew-pan, cover them with fresh cold water and cook until tender. Now pour off the water and pour over them a cup of sweet milk or cream, a little salt, pepper and chopped parsley, and thicken with a lump of butter rolled in flour. Stew a few moments and serve in a covered dish.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE is a plant in Cuba with leaves as hard as wood.

THE Sahara desert is three times as large as the Mediterranean.

AT Wardbury, Norway, the longest day lasts from May 21st to July 22nd, without interruption.

THE pneumatic tube between Paris and Berlin carries a letter from one city to the other in thirty-five minutes.

SCIENTIFIC men generally believe that the bed of the Pacific Ocean was once above water, and inhabited by men.

AUSTRALIA is the only country in the world where no native pipes and no native smokers have been found.

AT Tornes, Finland, June 21st brings a day twenty-two hours long, and Christmas Day is less than three hours in length.

A BICYCLE without any semblance of a handle-bar, but which is steered entirely by the motions of the rider's body, is the latest invention.

THE Chinese have a complicated calendar. Their cycles have 60 years, each year, month, and day having its own name.

IT is estimated that there are two hundred and forty thousand women domestic servants in London, and that ten thousand of these are always out of situations or changing their places.

FACETIES.

MOTHER (drilling Teddy for his first party): "And now, darling, what is a greedy boy?" Teddy: "A boy who wants everything I want."

"WHY, you are a new man—they've shaved you out of all recognition." "Y-e-e—he, he, the first time I looked in the glass I only knew myself by my voice."

POPPIN: "When I was in London I stopped at the best hotel." Badley: "Rather costly, wasn't it?" Poppin: "No; I only stopped to admire it."

"PA, what's a rebuff?" "You watch me the next time I come home late for dinner and try to say something that will tickle her. Then you'll see what a rebuff is."

HOAX: "They say that D'Auber's pictures of animals are very life-like." JOAK: "That's a fact; I saw one or two, and they were beautifullly enough."

A (to his friend, who is just leaving the restaurant): "Hold on, you're taking my hat!" B: "Oh, no! this is mine." A (jumping up): "Then I'm sitting on my own hat! I thought it was yours!"

OLDFATHER: "Is your married life one grand, sweet song?" Newlywed: "Well, since our baby's been born it's more like an opera, full of grand marches, with loud calls for the author every night."

"SO you confess that the unfortunate young man was carried to the pump, and there drenched with water? Now, Mr. Fresh, what part did you take in this disgraceful affair?" Undergraduate (meekly): "The left leg, sir."

MISTRESS (greatly distressed as Bridget awkwardly drops the chicken on the floor when about to place it on the table): "Dear me! Now we've lost our dinner!" Bridget: "Indeed, ye've not. Ol have me fut on it!"

PAPA: "I'm surprised that you are at the foot of your class, Tommy. Why aren't you at the head sometimes, like little Willie Bigtree?" Tommy: "You see, papa, Willie's got an awfully smart father, and I guess he takes after him."

"YOU ought to be married, sir," said the phrenologist to the victim of the stage. "Yes, sir, you ought to be married. You have no right sir, to have lived a bachelor so many years. Now, look at your clothes, sir. Who mended your coat, sir? Tell me that!" "My third wife, sir," was the reply.

FAITH HEALER: "If you can pay this bill, it will be a great accommodation to me. I am out of coal, and I have already begun to suffer for want of sufficient fire." The Patient: "I don't see why it isn't as easy for you to imagine you are not cold as for me to convince myself that this big ball on the back of my neck doesn't exist."

THE honeymoon was over, and the husband, returning from business, was grieved to find his little wife crying bitterly. "Oh, George," she sobbed, "such a dreadful thing has happened! I had made you a beautiful pie, all by myself, and Fido went and ate it!" "Well, never mind, my dear," he said cheerfully; "we can easily buy another dog."

"Not another morsel," exclaimed the new lady boarder, after eating enough for six able-bodied coal-heavers; "not another morsel. Really I don't know what will become of me; no appetite at all, you know. As my last landlady said, I don't eat enough to keep a bird alive." The boarders said nothing, but they all began wondering whether the bird she referred to was an ostrich or Sinbad's roe.

AN Irishman and his master were once working on the railway, when the master said: "Pat, go and get me one of those sleepers." "All right, yer honour," said Pat, and off he went. But he was gone such a long time that his master went to see what he was doing. He found Pat walking round and round the sleepers, and scratching his head, as he called out: "Pat, I thought I sent you for a sleeper!" "Xis, yer honour, so ye did; but, begorra, I can't wake 'em."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. F.—Wakefield is a city.

C. H.—The next leap-year will be 1904.

CHARLES.—The father is its legal guardian.

ANNOUNCE.—The letters are sufficient evidence of the debt.

R. S.—The husband inherits all the personal property.

H. S.—The children share equally, each taking a third.

RALPH.—There have been several conflicting decisions on the point.

ALFRED.—Quite correct, but it would be safer to write the numbers.

MICHAEL.—The German mark is of the value of an English shilling.

OLD READER.—Do you mean rates? The tenants should pay these.

WOMAN.—We think you are doing the best you can to get rid of them.

BENJAMIN.—A first bath should not last longer than a quarter of an hour.

LAURENCE.—Your best course would be to come to some arrangement for payment by instalments.

A. K.—As you broke off the engagement yourself, you cannot commence an action for breach of promise.

HESTER.—Beat together one ounce of clear honey, an ounce of almond oil, the juice of a lemon, and the yolk of a raw egg.

CLIVE.—Your wife can only "leave" what belongs to her alone. She cannot dispose of your furniture, or cattle, or anything else.

GRACE.—Your best course will be to encourage the attentions of neither of the gentlemen until you are sure of your own mind.

HOUSEWIFE.—To test the freshness of eggs, drop them slowly into a bowl of water, and if the small end comes to the top they are fresh.

M. W.—There is much room for improvement in the writing; it is most irregular and untidy. You should practice carefully every day.

CURIOS.—It is impossible to explain all that is implied by the phrase a "County Family." Its general meaning appears to us self-evident.

MISERABLE MABEL.—It is impossible for an outsider to settle a lover's quarrel; no doubt a few words of explanation would suffice to set matters right.

CONSTANT READER.—Soft water ought to be used, but if you cannot have that, allow no more than half an ounce of soda to one and a-half gallons of water.

MAINE.—Clean the steel first in the usual way, then rub it over with unsalted lard. Leave for a few minutes; then wipe off, and polish with a soft duster.

AMY.—Mix a small quantity of quicklime with half-a-pint of skim-milk. Wash the step first, and then paint all over with this mixture. The rain will not wash it off.

SCRAGGY.—Some persons are constitutionally thin and never can be stout. Avoid all acids as much as possible, and eat rump steaks, mutton chops, thick soups, and rice puddings.

H. L.—Mercury, otherwise called quicksilver, is found chiefly in Hungary, Spain, Italy and Peru. Mercury is extremely volatile, and may be turned into a flame by a very gentle heat.

HAROLD.—The only right course to adopt is to drop all attentions to any other lady but the one with whom you are in love, and then when you have proved your faithfulness she may relent.

RUBY.—We fear we cannot assist you, as you give us little information. Your best plan will be to consult a mutual friend, or someone at least who knows something of the circumstances of the case.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—It is hardly possible that a mere friendship should exist between those who were once lovers, when one party is again engaged. It would be prudent to risk such an experiment.

A. B.—Many find relief by a liberal strewing of powdered borax in their haunts; but it must be persevered in for a considerable time, and should be pushed into holes and crevices, where they resort in the daytime.

FOOTLIGHTS.—The profession you would like to make your own is one of the hardest in the world, and one which no one should think of adopting unless they have so much evident talent for it that they are likely to succeed.

WORNED NAM.—Your clothes should be a good colour if you always use plenty of water and see that the dirt is properly out of them always before they are boiled. Sun and air are the best bleachers, and no linen should be a bad colour that is well washed and dried in the open.

BALACLAVA.—The Light Brigade in the famous charge at Balaklava consisted of 118 men of the 4th Light Dragoons, 130 of the 13th Light Dragoons, 104 of the 8th Hussars, 110 of the 11th Hussars, and 145 of the 17th Lancers; the numbers who came out of action were 39, 51, 38, 23, and 25.

V. D.—Under your circumstances we should advise you, as your father is a man of means, and not dependent on your exertions, to seek some other place of residence, where at least the labour required of you would be lighter.

FLIRT.—Flirting is a reprehensible and dangerous as well as questionable "sport." It is always damaging to the reputation of a young lady. It may be delightful for the time; it is fatal in the end. No sensible man will marry a flirt.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Take four lemons, pare the rind as thin as possible; squeeze them into a quart of water, add half a pound of fine sugar, and let it stand two or three hours, then pass it through a jelly bag into decanters.

RHODA.—For removing old paint and varnish from woodwork apply an emulsion formed of two parts ammonia shaken up with one part of turpentine. This softens the paint that after a few moments it can be scraped or rubbed off.

IN DOUBT.—If you have every reason to believe your husband to be dead, you may after seven years marry again without fear of punishment for bigamy, but should he prove to be alive the second marriage would be null and void.

O. D.—Benzine is the best thing for removing grease spots from silk. Hold the silk over a cup or tumbler, and drop the benzine carefully on to the grease spot; as the benzine drops through the silk it dissolves the grease and carries it away.

SPOON.—Stretch a piece of note paper over your coin, hold it down at each side with the outspread fingers of your left hand, then with a common lead pencil rub over the coin, and in a short time you will find that an impression of it is produced on the paper.

A. L.—It is quite legal for any one to use in a book or magazine article an extract from another book or article, as long as the name of author and book are acknowledged; but should the appropriation go beyond an extract, the author's copyright is infringed.

HOME COMING.

OFFICE I dream that he comes home again
And as of old I meet him as the door
Glad at his coming—yet with mild reproof
That he came not before
And in the grey light of the early dawn
I wake to the old grief. He comes no more.

Through passing years the dream returns full oft,
And I have learned, even while the visions stay
To feel in inner consciousness, "It is a dream,
And I shall wake again to empty days."
Yet, always, when his kind face smiles to me,
I cry, "Oh, why so long?" the same old phrase.
Dreams are but shadows of our destinies,
Perhaps some day, somewhere, in a new home,
I yet may meet him, loving as of old.
And he shall greet me at the threshold stone,
And greet me, in the best loved voice I knew,
"Daughter, it has been long!"

WORRIED.—The simplest method to get rid of black-heads is by placing a watchkey over the worm and pressing gently, when it will come out into the barrel of the key; or by a gentle pressure beneath the nails of the opposite fingers, followed by the use of warm water and soap.

D. W.—Warm together till dissolved half a pint of turpentine and a quarter of a pound of beeswax. Dissolve two ounces of soft soap in half a pint of water, add to it a very little pearl ash and brown aniline dye, and when boiling pour the beeswax and turpentine into the other ingredients. Stir briskly till cold.

G. O. T.—The following makes an excellent paste: A solution of two and a half ounces gum-arabic in two quarts of warm water, thickened to a paste with wheat flour; to this is added a solution of alum and sugar of lead, one and a half ounces each, dissolved in water. The mixture is heated and stirred about to boil and is then cooled.

EGG.—If the chairs are morocco, they require simply to be washed with a damp sponge, and, as they are drying, brushed with a hard brush. This restores the gloss to real morocco. If the chairs are roan, which is the cheaper kind of leather, if the skin of the leather is unbroken, they should be varnished with leather varnish, but it must be done by a skilled person.

GRASS.—To polish gold chain, put the chain in a small glass bottle with water, a little tooth powder and some soap. Cork the bottle and shake it for a minute violently. The friction against the glass polishes the gold and the soap and chalk extract every particle of grease and dirt from the interstices of a chain of the most intricate pattern. Rinse it with clear cold water, wipe with a towel, and the polish will surprise you.

COOK.—Take the bone out of a small leg of mutton, then cut off most of the fat; fill the hole left with a stuffing the same as for fowls, adding to it a part of an onion cut fine. Then bind and tie up, put in a roasting pan, turn it in a cup of hot water, put in a moderately hot oven, basting occasionally. When done place on a warm platter, skim the grease from the drippings, add a cup of warm water, and thicken with a spoonful of dissolved flour. Send this gravy to the table with the mutton.

EMMIE N.—We have made every inquiry, and as yet cannot find a satisfactory reply to your first query. The best thing to do with your dress, is to send it to a reliable dyer and cleaner. These people can do it ever so much more nicely than it can be done at home. Have you not an agency for the Perth Dye Works in your town? However, if you really want to do it yourself, try benzine collars. This will remove the dirt. For your patent shoes you should procure a small bottle of patent leather cream, which is easily applied, and will polish them and preserve the leather from cracking.

TRY IT ON

Dab a small quantity on a Penny and leave it over night. If it sets up acid the surface will become green with Verdigris.

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A STORY FROM A PAST AGE.

WAS it Menenius Agrippa who wrote the famous fable about the stomach and the members? It is so long now since, as a boy, I had to dig out the meaning of it in the Latin reader at school that I can't be sure. It was either he or some other old sage who took that method of impressing what he conceived to be a needed lesson upon the producing classes of Rome. He made the various members of the body appear to complain of the stomach on the ground that it was a lazy holder of idle wealth; that it not only contributed nothing to the original prosperity of the concern, but secreted and misapplied the results of the energy and labour of others. For this reason (these members declared) they were dead sick and tired of Mr. Stomach, and calculated they could get on quite as well, or better, without him.

What Stomach said in his own defence every schoolboy (who hasn't forgotten it) can tell you. What we say now-a-days is this:—That while there must be people to raise grain there must also be people to make it into flour; we must have farmers and we must have millers. Yes, and by the same token, we have got to have bakers too. Let's have a look and see how the process runs:—

Now, any one of a million women might have written the following letter; and so the woman who actually did write it may be considered as speaking for all the rest—dates and places excepted of course—and they are nothing.

"In December, 1897," she says, "I was on a visit to Monmouth. While there I was unexpectedly taken ill. The trouble was of the digestive organs. I was attacked with intense pain in the stomach, amounting at certain moments to agony; and this pain continued for hours. After my return home I was weak and powerless. My appetite quite forsook me, and the little food I took gave me great pain at the chest and stomach.

"I was frequently sick, and had no ease until I had vomited all I had eaten. The whole of my abdomen was swollen, and was so painful that I could scarcely move.

"As time went on I grew worse and worse,

until I was finally obliged to stop trying to do my housework; and when a woman gives up duties which are so much a part of her life, both from interest and habit, she feels badly indeed.

"In this crisis I was compelled to ask my daughter who lives in Cardiff to come and nurse me, and she did so. By this time I was confined to my bed, and seemingly sinking from week to week, in spite of all that was done to relieve and strengthen me.

"So serious did my friends consider my condition to be that I was treated by three doctors, all clever men in their profession, who did in vain what they could to combat the disease which was wearing me away. I took small quantities of nourishment, and might almost as well have taken none at all, seeing that it failed to digest, or to do me any good.

"As day after day went by I got more feeble and felt as if I were approaching the end which is appointed to all living.

"This was in July, 1898—seven months after I was attacked by the illness in Monmouth. At this time an acquaintance, Mr. Saunders, of Tintern Abbey, called, and, seeing my desperate condition, expressed his sympathy, and asked if I had ever tried Mother Seigel's Syrup for my trouble. I said no, and he urged me to resort to it at once, giving his reasons for his faith in its efficacy.

"I began taking it, and in a few days felt a distinct improvement. My appetite revived somewhat, and I had no more pain after taking nourishment. From this date onward—using Mother Seigel's Syrup only—I gained strength; the disease gradually abating, until I was entirely free of it. I am now strong and well, and have every occasion to credit the syrup with having saved my life." (Signed) (Mrs.) EMMA BROWN, Oak Tree Cottage, Llandogo, Mon., April 6, 1899.

The stomach is not "a lazy holder of idle wealth." Oh, no. It is the source of life, the maker of riches for its owner. Therefore use it well, and when it wearies of the task help it with Mother Seigel's Syrup.



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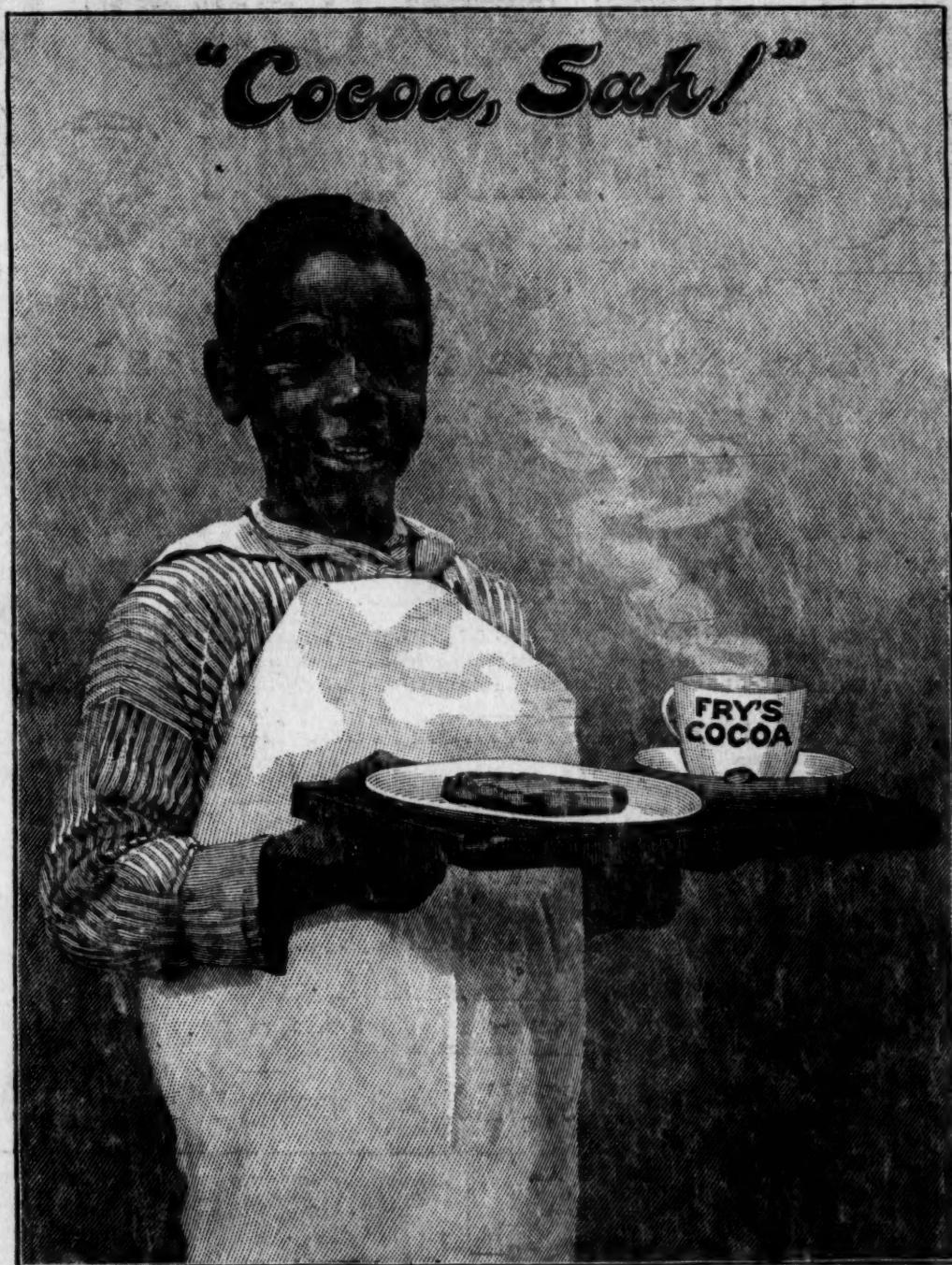
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